

ASA briefing note: Advertising of hair and beauty products and services

This briefing note should be considered as part of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee's inquiry into the science and regulation of hair and beauty products and treatments.

Remit

- The ASA system has taken a proactive role in addressing illegal, harmful and/or misleading advertising in a number of high priority areas related to this inquiry. However, our role and remit relates to advertising of products and services, which means we are not the body constituted to regulate procedures or the products themselves.

Rules

- The UK Advertising Codes contain overarching principles that prohibit ads across media, including online and social media, from containing anything that is likely to be misleading, harmful or otherwise irresponsible. And the rules, and the ASA's work, place a particular emphasis on protecting young and vulnerable people.
- The [Advertising Codes](#) contain dedicated content and targeting rules on medicines, medical devices, health-related products, treatments and beauty products. **The rules in this section are designed to ensure that ads for these products receive a necessary high level of scrutiny, including requiring that claims about the efficacy or safety of a treatment, or the qualifications of a healthcare practitioner are backed by suitably robust evidence, and that they're targeted away from under-18 audiences.** Crucially, the rules apply to ads and not the products, which are regulated by health regulators such as the MHRA.
- We recognise that there is a potential for advertising to have a negative impact on body image, mental health and self-esteem. Our rules reflect that all ads should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society, so we require advertisers to portray body image responsibly, avoiding the promotion of unrealistic or harmful body standards.
- For **cosmetic interventions**, our rules state:
Marketing communications for cosmetic interventions must not be directed at those aged below 18 years through the selection of media or context in which they appear.
Cosmetic interventions mean any intervention, procedure or treatment carried out with the primary objective of changing an aspect of a consumer's physical appearance. This includes surgical and non-surgical interventions, both invasive and non-invasive.
- Examples of "cosmetic interventions" that the targeting rules are intended to cover include, but are not limited to: breast augmentation or uplift procedures, breast reduction, abdominoplasty ('tummy tuck'), blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), rhytidectomy (face lift), labiaplasty, hair restoration surgery, dermal fillers, skin rejuvenation treatments such as injectable treatments, chemical peels, micro-needling, non-ablative laser treatments, laser or light treatments, micropigmentation (for example, permanent makeup tattoo), teeth whitening treatments.
- Our guidance on cosmetic interventions advertising also [covers](#) the **qualifications** of those administering these procedures. We advise that practitioners take care not to exaggerate or

mislead about the qualities of the service they provide, for example their track record, facilities, nursing and other staff. And clinics must be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC); the ASA or CAP may require proof of registration.

- Claims about the **efficacy** of interventions must be supported by robust evidence. Our [guidance](#) sets out further that ads must not mislead as to what an advertised intervention is likely to achieve for the average consumer and ads should not imply unrealistic results.
- The same rules apply for beauty products. Ads for **beauty, grooming and hygiene products** must be able to provide evidence for any claims they are making in their ads about the efficacy of their product. This includes claims like “65% reduction in the appearance of wrinkles”, “8/10 women agreed their skin looked smoother” and “The UK’s number one shampoo for coloured hair.”
- Cosmetic surgery is not a decision that should be taken lightly and we take a firm line on ads that **trivialise** a cosmetic procedure or put pressure on individuals to **make quick-buying decisions**. Ads should not imply procedures are quick and easy with minimal invasiveness and recovery time if they aren’t, and we advise advertisers to always highlight the need for a consultation before booking a procedure and any risks associated with cosmetic surgery.
- Whilst our rules do allow for the use of airbrushing and other post-production techniques, advertisers should make clear that these techniques have been used through the use of superimposed qualifications or disclaimers, and they should not be used to such an extent that they **exaggerate the capabilities** of the product. Similarly, the use of “before” and “after” pictures are allowed but not if post-production techniques were only used on the “after” picture.

Monitoring, enforcement and project work

Liquid BBLs

- In April 2025, the ASA published [six key rulings](#) on ads for liquid Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) procedures, following intelligence gathering by our Active Ad Monitoring system, which uses AI to proactively search for online ads that might break the rules. The ads used time-limited offers, downplayed risks or exploited consumers’ body image insecurities.
- Our monitoring of ads for non-surgical liquid BBLs has [revealed](#) that advertising of the sector remains concerning. Using our Active Ad Monitoring System (AAMs) to process 900 ads between April and December 2025, we found that only 11.5% of the ads we assessed stuck to the advertising rules. We found that ads used limited offers that risk pressuring people into making quick decisions about serious medical procedures, claimed that procedures were ‘safe’ and played on body insecurities. Following this monitoring, we’ve contacted clinics telling them to amend or remove ads that broke the rules and to set out clearly the rules they must stick to, as well as working with Meta to have problem ads removed.
- It’s extremely rare to see such a high proportion of advertisers in one area breaking the rules, pointing towards deeper problems in a sector that lacks regulation. We support the introduction of measures by government that would only allow suitably qualified medical professionals to carry out high-risk procedures, helping to strengthen protections for the public. We hope that more formal oversight of the sector would extend to the way it is advertised to the public. Once those regulations are in place, we’ll resume our proactive AI-led monitoring to ensure advertising in this sector reflects the seriousness and risks of these procedures.

Cosmetic tourism

- We also [monitored](#) advertising by overseas cosmetic surgery clinics targeting UK audiences. We processed 4,000 ads across two monitoring phases and instructed 24 clinics to remove problematic ads, such as ads promoting ‘Mommy makeover’ packages and using time limited offers.
- Following our [enforcement](#) and [guidance](#), the number of advertisers sticking to the rules increased to 84.2%. This shows how targeted, proactive enforcement can drive real improvements, helping to make advertising for high-risk procedures safer and more responsible for the public.

Botox

- In 2019, working with over 25 trade bodies, regulators and pharmaceutical companies, CAP issued an [Enforcement Notice](#) on social media Botox advertising that was sent to over 130,000 practitioners across the cosmetics services industry (with over 12,000 irresponsible Instagram posts removed in one quarter).
- Work in this area is ongoing. In 2023 our AI-based Active Ad Monitoring system checked 580k social media posts to look for illegal ads for prescription-only medications and we work closely with platforms to get problem ads promptly removed.

Sunbeds

- The ASA has observed ongoing public health concerns about the risks of UV exposure and the continued popularity of tanning, particularly among Gen Z. In May 2025, we opened a proactive project into online ads for sunbeds and related tanning products which make claims that suggest there may be a safe, or safer, way to obtain a tan.
- Using our Active Ad Monitoring System, we scanned thousands of sponsored ads across social media platforms (including TikTok, Instagram and Facebook) to identify trends. Ads were subsequently manually narrowed down manually by Data Science considering their recency and relevance, leaving 382 ads to be manually reviewed by a Sunbed Project Team that had been established to recognise trends in breaches, and decide on potential for further action.
- The areas where the Project Team saw the most potential breaches included: ‘Safe’ tanning claims and claims of health benefits and treatment for medical conditions. This led to project investigations in these areas: safe tanning, health benefits, managing health conditions.
- In January 2026, we published five upheld rulings against advertisers ([The Sun Company](#), [SunShine Co](#), [Tanbox Towcester](#), [JD Tanning UK](#) and [Byrokko](#)) who were found to be promoting ‘safe tanning’. We found that by downplaying this risk or presenting tanning as beneficial to health, these ads were irresponsible and likely to mislead people. Some ads also crossed a further line by implying that sunbeds could be used to help manage medical conditions, which risked discouraging people from seeking appropriate medical advice or treatment.

LED face masks

- In November 2025, we published four proactive [rulings](#) relating to ads for LED facemasks making claims to be able to treat medical conditions such as acne. Following this, we published [guidance](#) for the industry.

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