

# Children's exposure to age-restricted TV ads: 2020 update





# Content

- Introduction
- Key findings
- Exposure to TV ads: comparison with TV ads for toys
- Annual exposure to all TV ads
- Exposure to TV ads for alcohol products
- Exposure to TV ads for gambling products
- Annex A: How BARB data is presented and analysed in this report
- Annex B: Further information





# Introduction

**The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)** is the UK's independent advertising regulator. We have been administering the **UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing** (written and maintained by the **Committee of Advertising Practice**) for 60 years and the **UK Code of Broadcast Advertising** (written and maintained by the **Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice**) for 17 years. We are responsible for ensuring that advertising is legal, decent, honest and truthful.

The Advertising Codes include rules to protect people who are vulnerable, including children (which the Codes define as those aged 15 and under) and young people (those aged 16 and 17). They include rules on the scheduling and placement of ads to ensure that under-18's exposure to advertisements for certain product categories, such as alcohol and gambling, is appropriately limited. The rules prohibit these ads from appearing in children's and young people's media and, where they appear in media targeting a predominantly adult audience, the content is restricted to ensure that they cannot appeal particularly to those under the age of 18.





# Introduction

Since 2019, we have reported annually on children's exposure to age-restricted TV ads, such as ads for alcohol and gambling products. The objective of the ASA's reporting in this area is to provide longitudinal analysis of children's exposure to those TV ads, over a number of years, for products which attract public policy considerations, including the potential impact of those products on children and young people.

This report provides an analysis of children's exposure to alcohol and gambling ads on TV from 2008, with an update of exposure data from 2020.

2008 represents the first full year in which the gambling advertising rules were implemented. The choice of this starting point has implications for the patterns of audience exposure that are identified in this report; it is important to interpret their significance within the context of the parameters selected.





## Key findings



# Key findings

## **Alcohol ads:**

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to alcohol advertising on TV decreased by just over two thirds, from an average of 2.8 ads per week in 2008 to 0.9 ads per week in 2020.
- The average number of alcohol ads children saw in 2020 remained at the same level as in 2019 (0.9 ads per week), the lowest in the 13-year period covered, and remained at similar levels to those observed in the four previous years.

## **Gambling ads:**

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to gambling ads increased by just under a quarter from an average in 2008 of 2.2 ads per week to 2.8 ads per week in 2020.
- It should be noted that exposure levels decreased by just over a third from a peak average of 4.4 ads in 2013. Given the changes in exposure levels over the 13-year period, children's exposure to gambling ads has remained fairly stable and at lower levels over the past five years.



# Key findings

**All TV ads:** Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to all TV ads halved (falling by 52.8%), from 219.5 ads per week in 2008 to 103.7 ads per week in 2020, the lowest in the 13-year period.

The number of TV ads seen by children has continued to decline at a steady rate since the peak in 2013, at an average of 229.3 ads per week, and have reduced by just over half, at 103.7 ads per week in 2020. Over the same period, children's exposure to:

- TV alcohol ads decreased by two thirds;
- TV gambling ads decreased by just over a third.

This suggests that children's exposure to TV ads for alcohol is falling at a faster rate than their exposure to all TV ads. While the rate of decline in children's exposure to gambling ads on TV is marginally lower than the rate of decrease in exposure to all TV ads, children's exposure to gambling ads has remained at a lower level since the 2013 peak.





## **Annual exposure to all TV ads**

This section contains data which provides important contextual information to the product category specific exposure data presented in the following sections of the report.





# Key findings

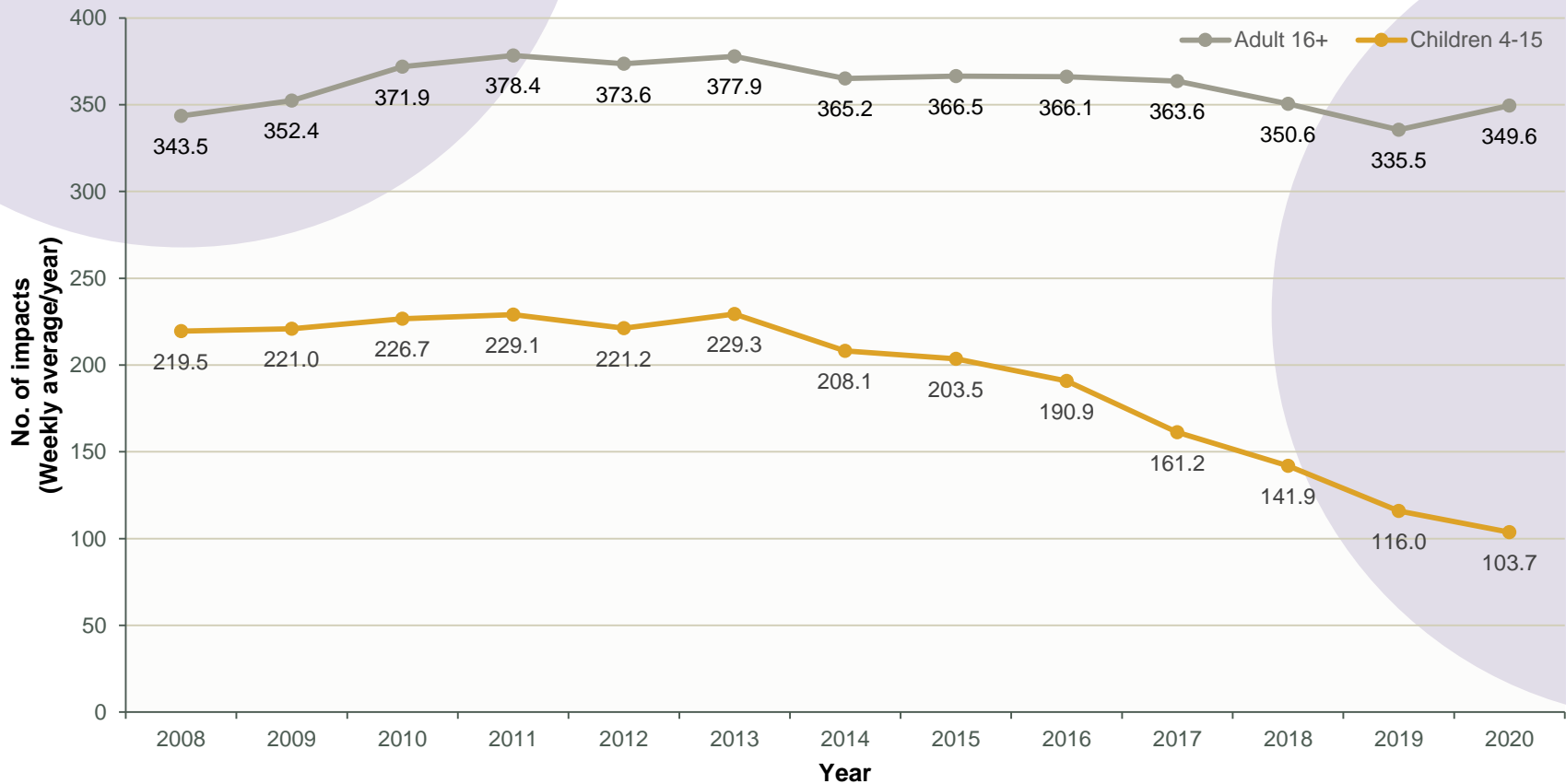
- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to all TV ads decreased by 52.8% from, on average, 219.5 ads per week in 2008 to 103.7 ads per week in 2020, the lowest in the 13-year period. Children's exposure levels have continued to decline at a steady rate since the peak in 2013 (at 229.3 ads per week).
- Between 2008 and 2020, adults' exposure to all TV ads increased by 1.8% from 343.5 ads per week in 2008 to 349.6 ads per week in 2020. In 2020, adults' exposure to all TV ads, at an average of 349.6 ads per week, have returned to similar levels as those in 2008 and 2018, following a small dip in 2019.
- In contrast to children's exposure, adults' exposure to all TV ads continues to remain relatively stable over the 13-year period.
- Children's ad exposure, relative to adults, has fallen from a peak of 63.9% in 2008 to 29.7% in 2020. That means children saw, on average, between one and two ads for every five ads seen by adults in 2020.



## Children's exposure to all TV ads fell to its lowest level in 2020

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to all TV ads decreased by 52.8%, to the lowest level in the 13-year period.
- Between 2008 and 2020, adults' exposure to all TV ads increased by 1.8% In 2020 and continues to remain relatively stable over the 13-year period.

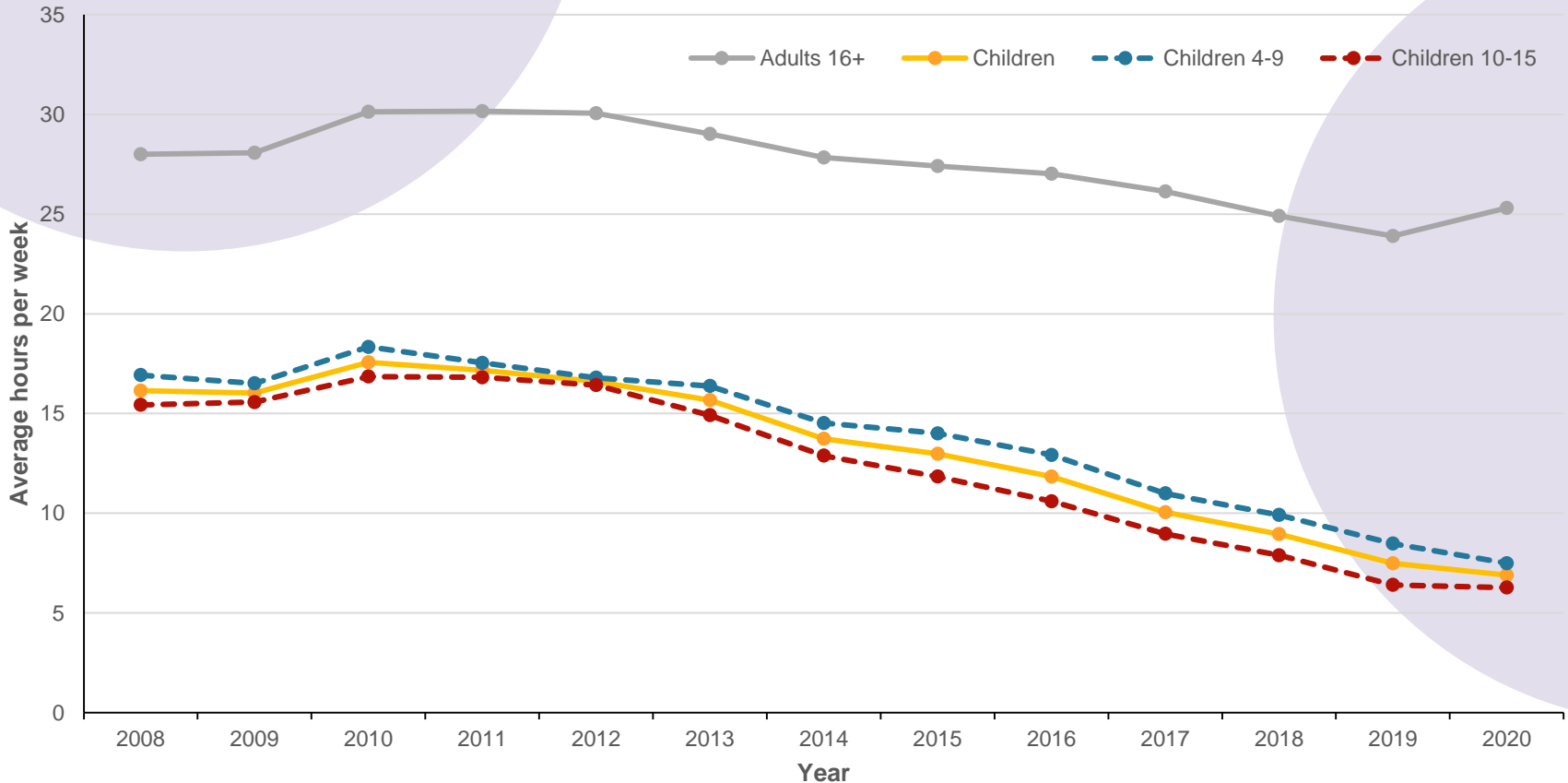
### Average weekly exposure per year – age group



## Time spent by children watching TV continued to decline in 2020

- Continuation of the downward trend in children's exposure to TV ads is likely to be mainly driven by their increasing consumption of online media, such as on-demand, online video use and social media.
- BARB viewing data analysis\* indicates that the amount of time children spent watching broadcast television continues to decrease. In 2020, children aged 4-15 watched, on average, 6.9 hours of television per week, down by 0.6 hours from 2019, and reduced by three fifths from the peak viewing levels in 2010 (at 17.6 hours per week).

### Average hours of television viewing – 2008-2020



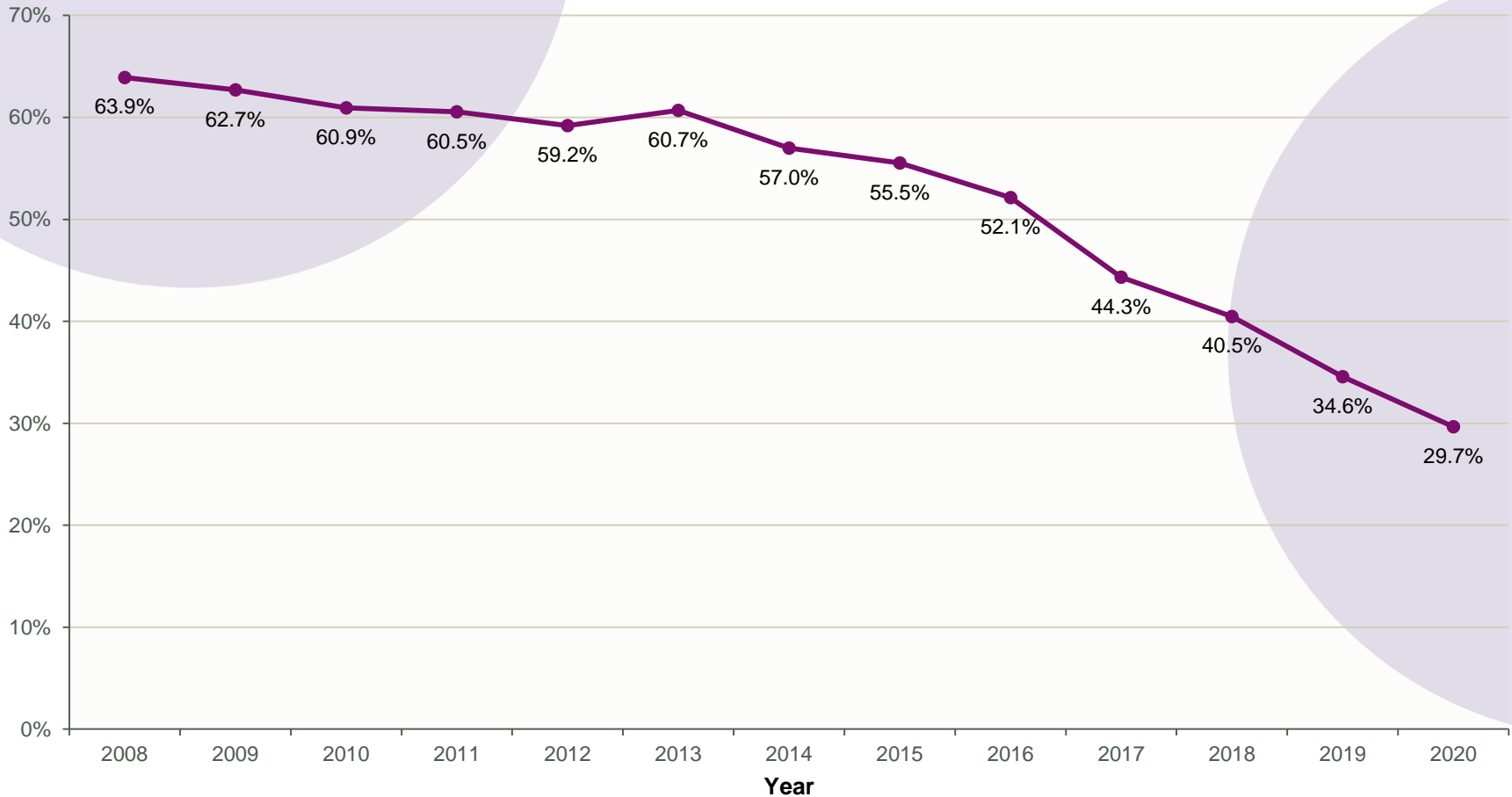
\*In 2010, a new BARB audience panel was introduced and, as a result, data comparisons pre and post 2010 should be made with caution.



## In 2020, children saw, on average between one and two TV ads for every five seen by adults

- Children's exposure to all TV ads, relative to adults, has fallen from a peak of 63.9% in 2008 to 29.7% in 2020.
- Children saw, on average, between one and two ads for every five ads seen by adults in 2020.

### Children's exposure to all TV ads as a percentage of adults' exposure





# Exposure to TV ads: comparison with TV ads for toys



# Children's exposure to TV ads: comparison with TV ads for toys

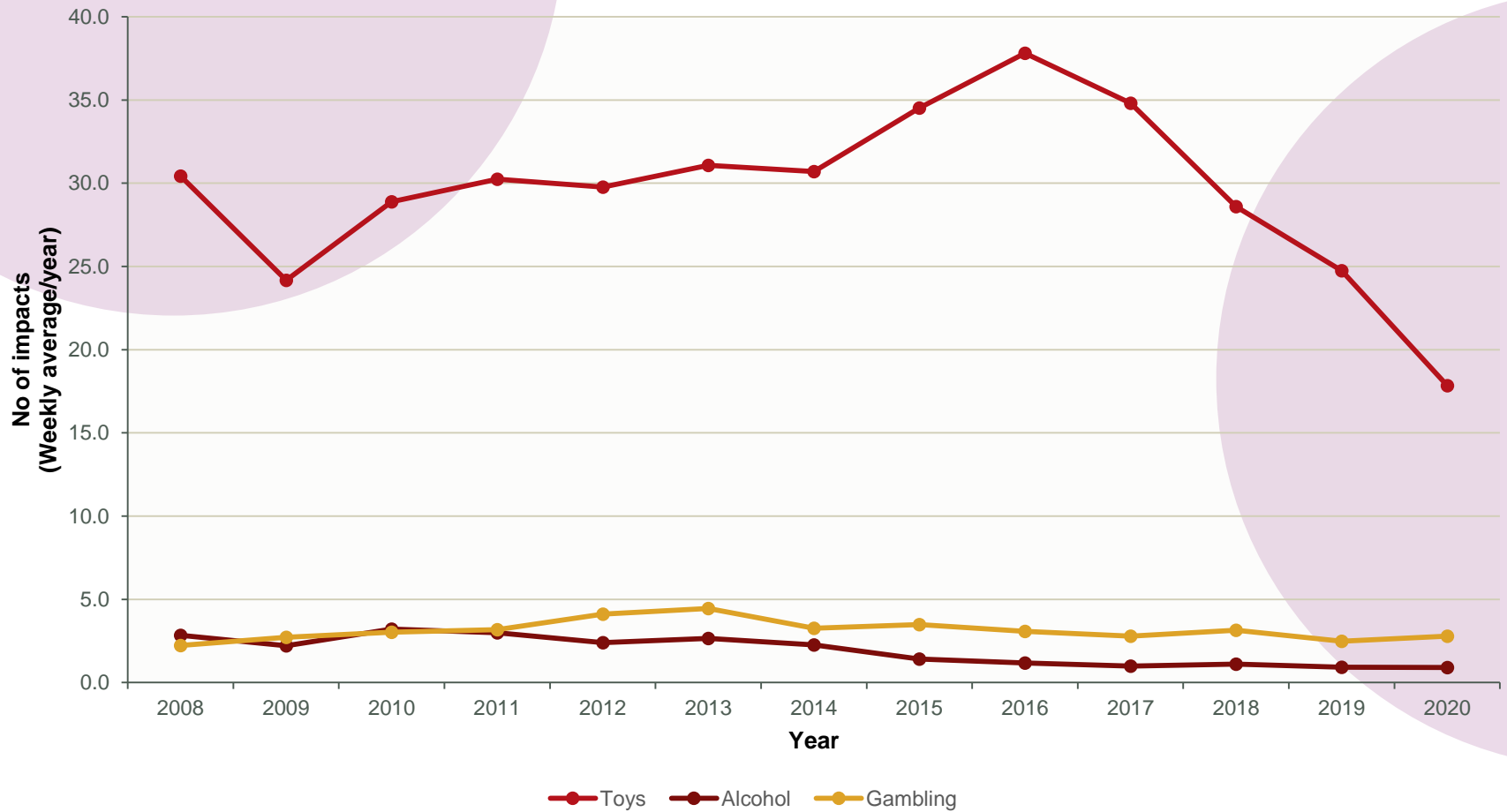
The following chart contrasts children's exposure to TV ads for toys with their exposure to TV ads for alcohol and gambling, which are the subject of this report, and is provided for context.

It illustrates that high exposure levels can be achieved when advertisers can legitimately and specifically target their product advertising to child audiences. Children's exposure to TV advertising for toys is significantly higher than their exposure to alcohol or gambling advertising on TV.

The BCAP Code places restrictions on TV ads for alcohol and gambling products from being scheduled in or adjacent to children's programmes, as well as programmes of particular appeal to them; no such scheduling restrictions are placed on TV advertising for toys.



# Children's exposure to TV ads: comparison with TV ads for toys





# Exposure to TV ads for alcohol products





# Exposure to TV ads for alcohol products

## The BCAP Code states:

**32.2** [The following products] may not be advertised in or adjacent to programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to audiences below the age of 18:

**32.2.1** alcoholic drinks containing 1.2% alcohol or more by volume

**32.4** [The following products] may not be advertised in or adjacent to programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to persons below the age of 16:

**32.4.7** drinks containing less than 1.2% alcohol by volume when presented as low alcohol or no-alcohol versions of an alcoholic drink



# Key findings

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to alcohol advertising on TV reduced by just over two thirds from an average of 2.8 ads per week in 2008 to 0.9 ads per week in 2020. The average number of alcohol ads children saw in 2020 remained at the same level as in 2019 (0.9 ads per week), the lowest in the 13-year period covered, and remained at similar levels to that observed in the four previous years.
- Children's exposure to alcohol ads, relative to adults, has fallen from a peak of 41.1% in 2008 to 17.0% in 2020. That means children saw, on average, just under one alcohol on TV for every five ads seen by adults in 2020.
- In 2020, alcohol ads made up 0.9% of all TV ads seen by children. Alcohol ads continue to make up less than 1.5% of all TV ads seen by children annually over the analysis period, and account for less than 1% between 2015 and 2020.



# Key findings

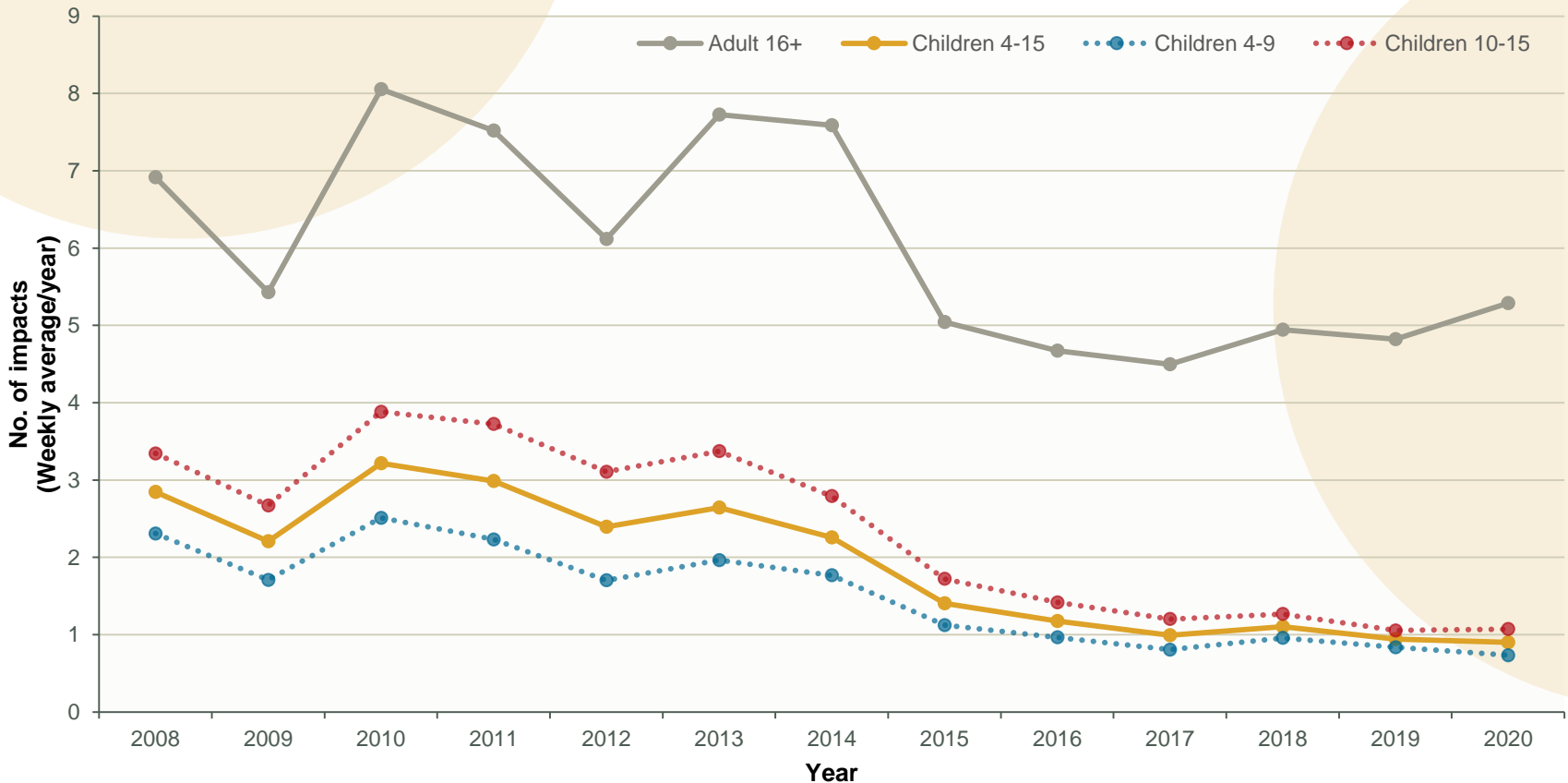
- In 2020, the majority of TV ads for alcohol that children saw were ads for spirits and liqueurs, followed by ads for beer, cider or perry. This represents a slight change from 2019 in which the majority of alcohol ads children saw on TV were for beer, cider or perry, followed by ads for spirits and liqueurs.
- Children's exposure to all TV ads reduced by just over half from a peak of 229.3 ads per week in 2013 to a low of 103.7 ads per week in 2020. Over the same period, children's exposure to alcohol ads on TV reduced by two thirds. This suggests children's exposure to alcohol ads continues to fall at a faster rate than exposure to all TV ads.



## In 2020, children saw, on average, 0.9 alcohol ads per week on TV

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to alcohol ads on TV reduced by just over two thirds from an average of 2.8 ads per week (approx. 75.8 secs) in 2008 to 0.9 ads per week (approx. 19.7 secs) in 2020.
- Children's exposure in 2020 remained at the same level as in 2019 (0.9 ads per week), the lowest in the 13-year period covered, and remained at similar levels to that observed in the four previous years.

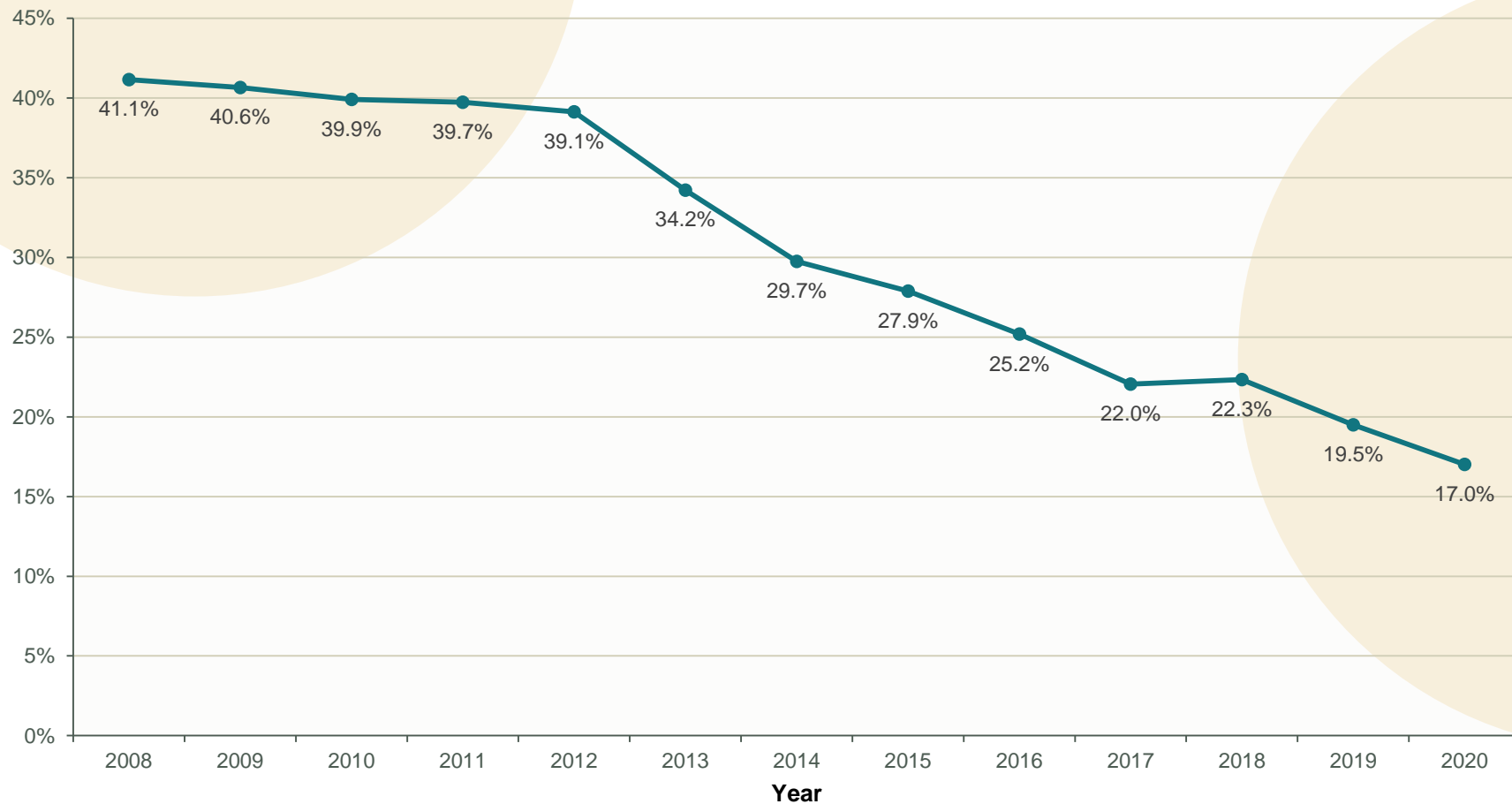
### Average weekly exposure per year – age group



## In 2020, children saw, on average, just under one alcohol ad for every five seen by adults

- Children's exposure to alcohol ads, relative to adults, has fallen from a peak of 41.1% in 2008 to 17.0% in 2020.
- Children saw, on average, just under one alcohol ad on TV for every five ads seen by adults in 2020.

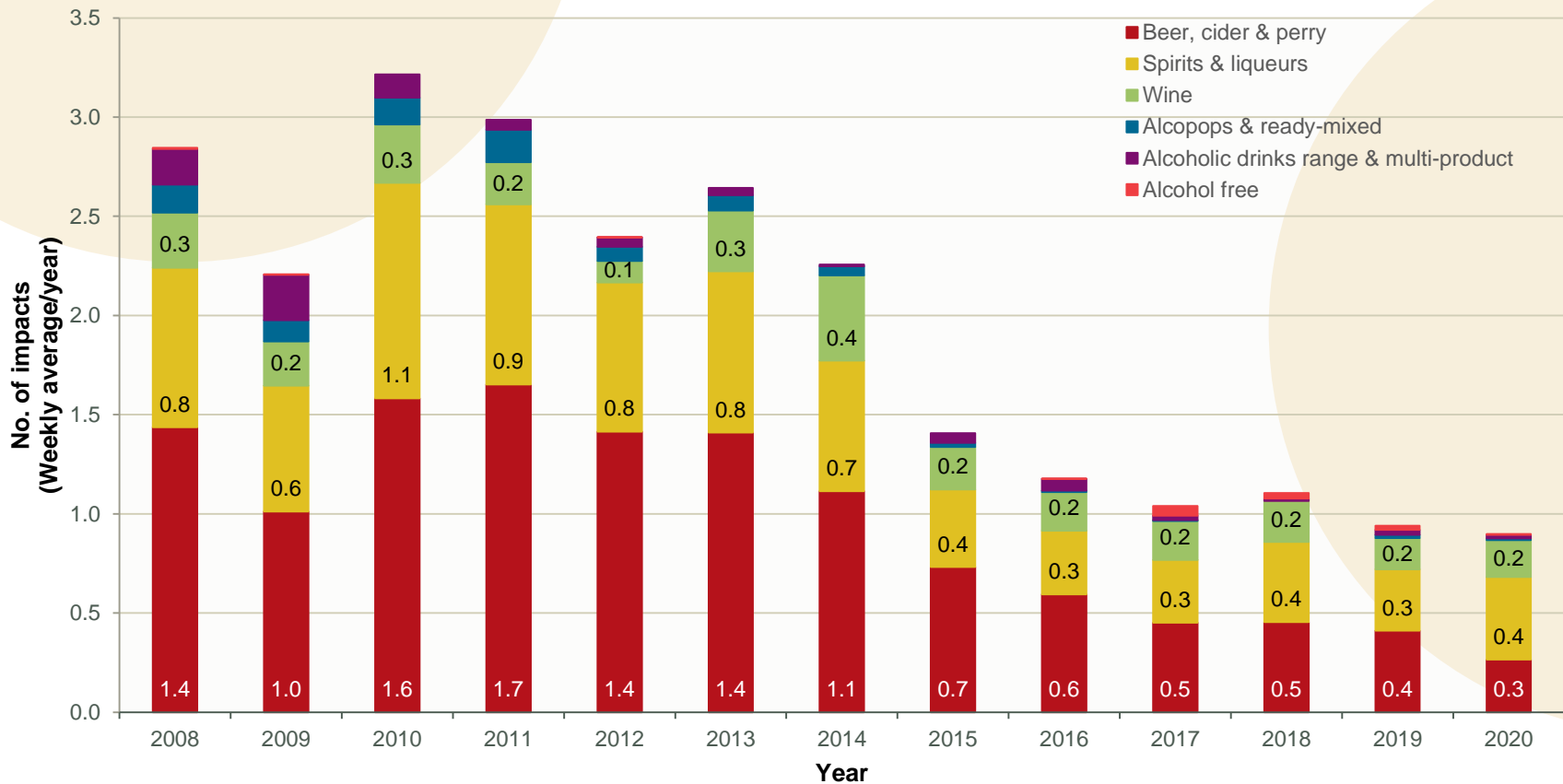
### Children's exposure to alcohol ads as a percentage of adults' exposure



## Majority of alcohol ads children saw on TV were for spirits and liqueurs

- In 2020, the majority of TV ads for alcohol that children saw were ads for spirits and liqueurs, followed by ads for beer, cider or perry.
- This represents a slight change from 2019 in which the majority of alcohol ads children saw on TV were for beer, cider or perry, followed by ads for spirits and liqueurs.

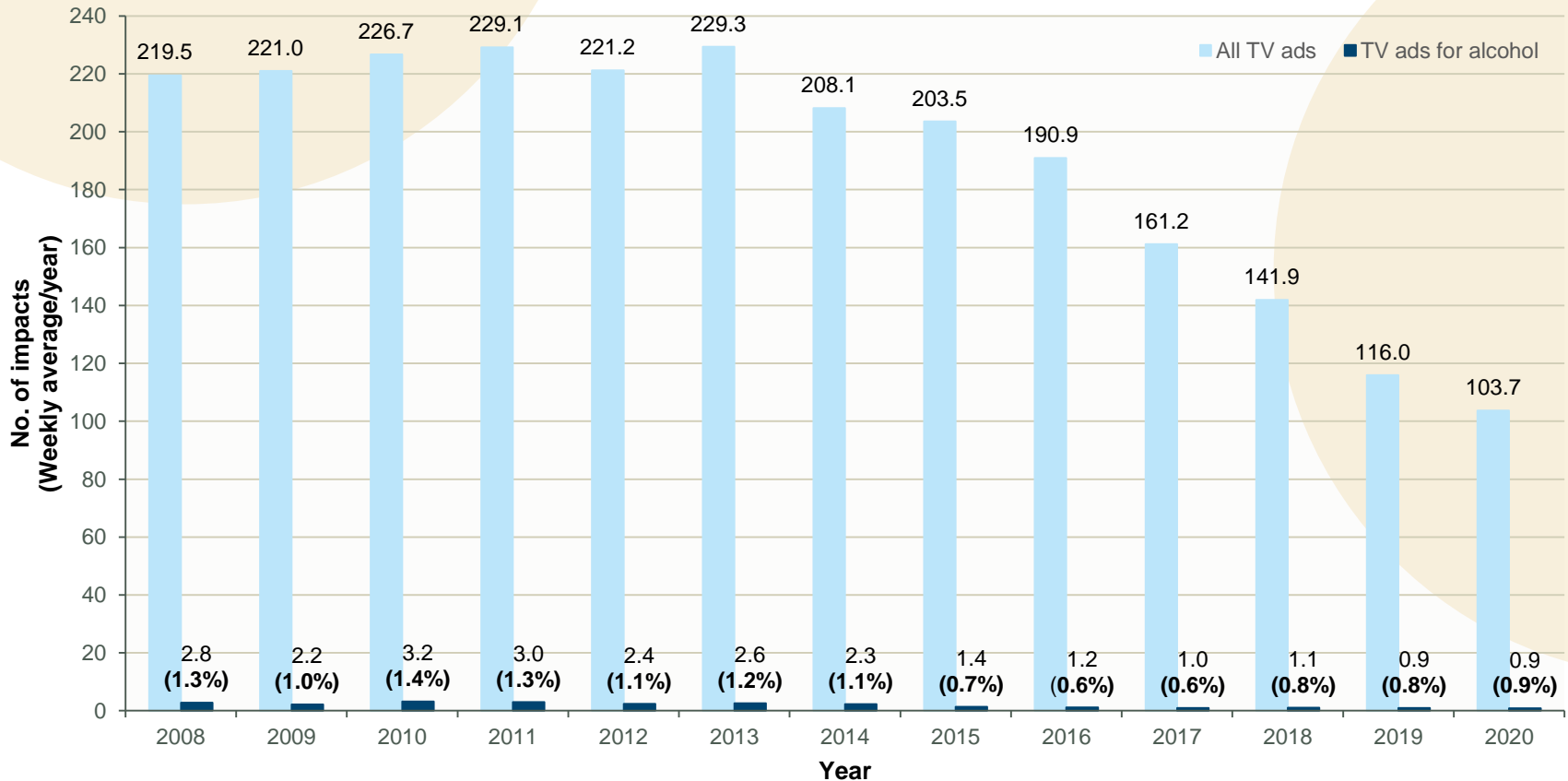
### Children's exposure to alcohol ads – proportion of product types



## Alcohol ads made up 0.9% of all TV ads seen by children in 2020

- In 2020, alcohol ads made up 0.9% of all TV ads seen by children. Alcohol ads continue to make up less than 1.5% of all TV ads seen by children annually over the analysis period, and account for less than 1% between 2015 and 2020.
- Children's exposure to all TV ads reduced by just over half from a peak of 229.3 ads per week in 2013 to a low of 103.7 ads per week in 2020. Over the same period, children's exposure to alcohol ads on TV reduced by two thirds. This suggests children's exposure to alcohol ads continues to fall at a faster rate than exposure to all TV ads.

### Children's exposure to all TV ads as a percentage of exposure to all TV ads





# Exposure to TV ads for gambling products





# Exposure to TV ads for gambling products

## The BCAP Code rules state:

**32.2** [The following products] may not be advertised in or adjacent to programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to audiences below the age of 18:

**32.2.2** gambling except lotteries, football pools, equal-chance gaming (under a prize gaming permit or at a licensed family entertainment centre), prize gaming (at a non-licensed family entertainment centre or at a travelling fair) or Category D gaming machines

**32.4** [The following products] may not be advertised in or adjacent to programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to persons below the age of 16:

**32.4.1** lotteries

**32.4.2** football pools

**32.4.3** equal-chance gaming (under a prize gaming permit or at a licensed family entertainment centre)

**32.4.4** prize gaming (at a non-licensed family entertainment centre or at a travelling fair)

**32.4.5** Category D gaming machines



# Key findings

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to gambling ads increased by just under a quarter from an average in 2008 of 2.2 ads per week to 2.8 ads per week in 2020. Exposure levels decreased by just over a third from a peak average of 4.4 ads in 2013. Given the changes in exposure levels over the 13-year period, children's exposure to gambling ads has remained fairly stable and at lower levels over the past five years.
- Children's exposure to gambling ads, relative to adults', has fallen year-on-year from 38.6% in 2008 to 16.3% in 2020, the lowest in the 13-year period. That means children saw, on average, about just under one TV ad for gambling for every five seen by adults in 2020.
- Gambling ads made up less than 2% of all the TV ads that children saw on average every year between 2008 and 2017. This percentage increased marginally to 2.2% in 2018, with a further slight increase to 2.7% in 2020.



# Key findings

- The majority of gambling ads that children have seen since 2011 (the first year in exposure data for different gambling product categories can be confidently broken down\*) continues to comprise ads for bingo, lottery and scratchcards.
  - Children's exposure to lottery and scratchcard ads on TV increased marginally in 2020 from 2019 but remained at similar levels observed in the seven preceding years.
  - Children's exposure to bingo ads on TV has remained at similar levels to those observed in the three preceding years.
  - Children's exposure to ads for sports-betting has decreased from a peak in 2011 and has remained at the lowest level over the 10-year period since 2019.
- Children's exposure to all TV ads reduced by just over half from a peak of 229.3 ads per week in 2013 to a low of 103.7 ads per week in 2020. Over the same period, children's exposure to gambling ads decreased by over a third. This suggests that while children's exposure to gambling ads on TV has remained stable, at a lower level since a peak in 2013, children's exposure to all TV ads has declined at a faster rate over the same period.

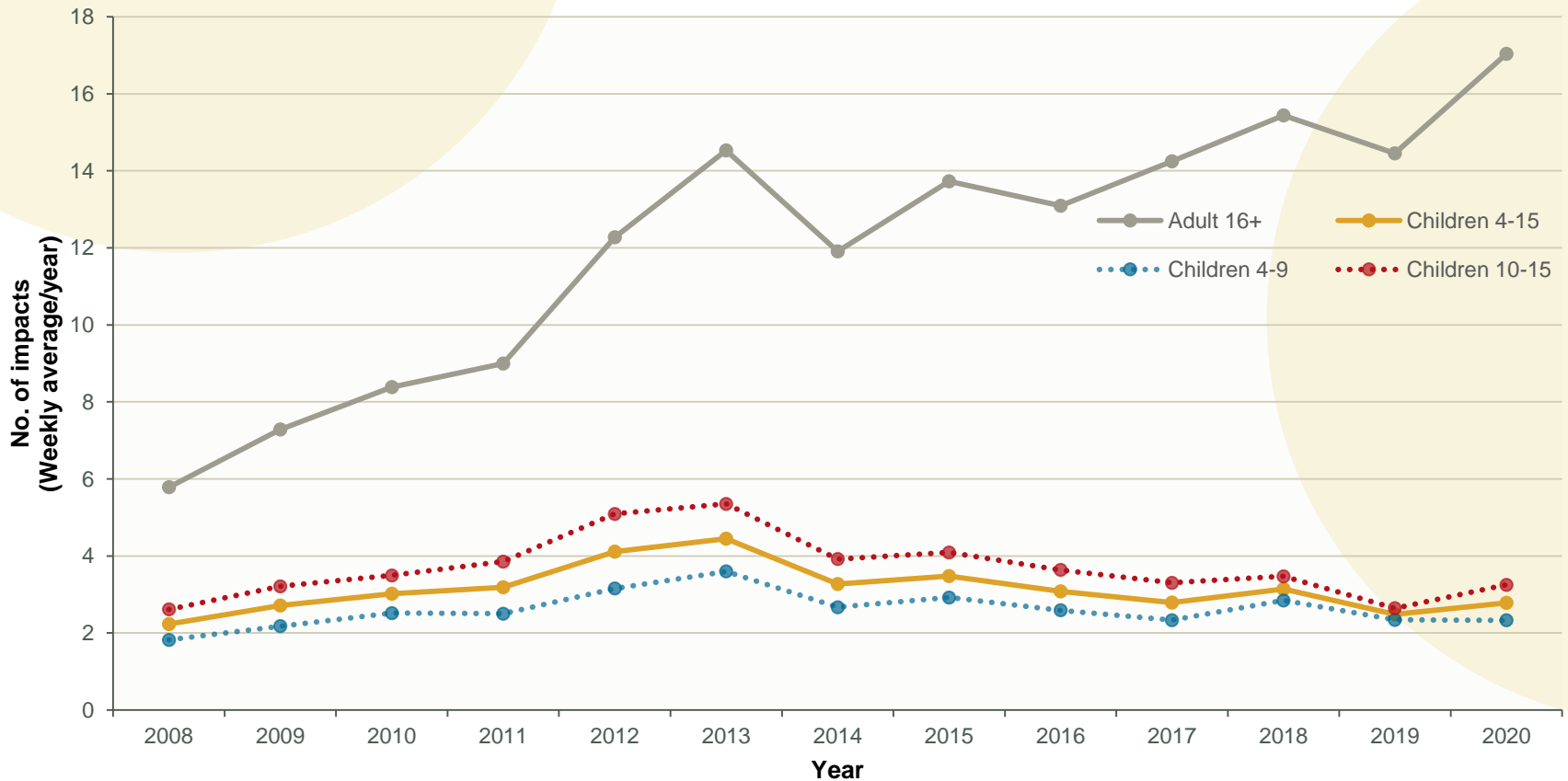
\*See footnote on page 36.



## In 2020, children saw, on average, 2.8 gambling ads per week on TV

- Between 2008 and 2020, children's exposure to gambling ads increased by just under a quarter from an average of 2.2 ads per week (approx. 48.0 secs) in 2008 to 2.8 ads per week (approx. 65.8 secs) in 2020.
- Given the changes in exposure levels over the 13-year period, children's exposure to gambling ads has remained fairly stable and at lower levels over the past five years.

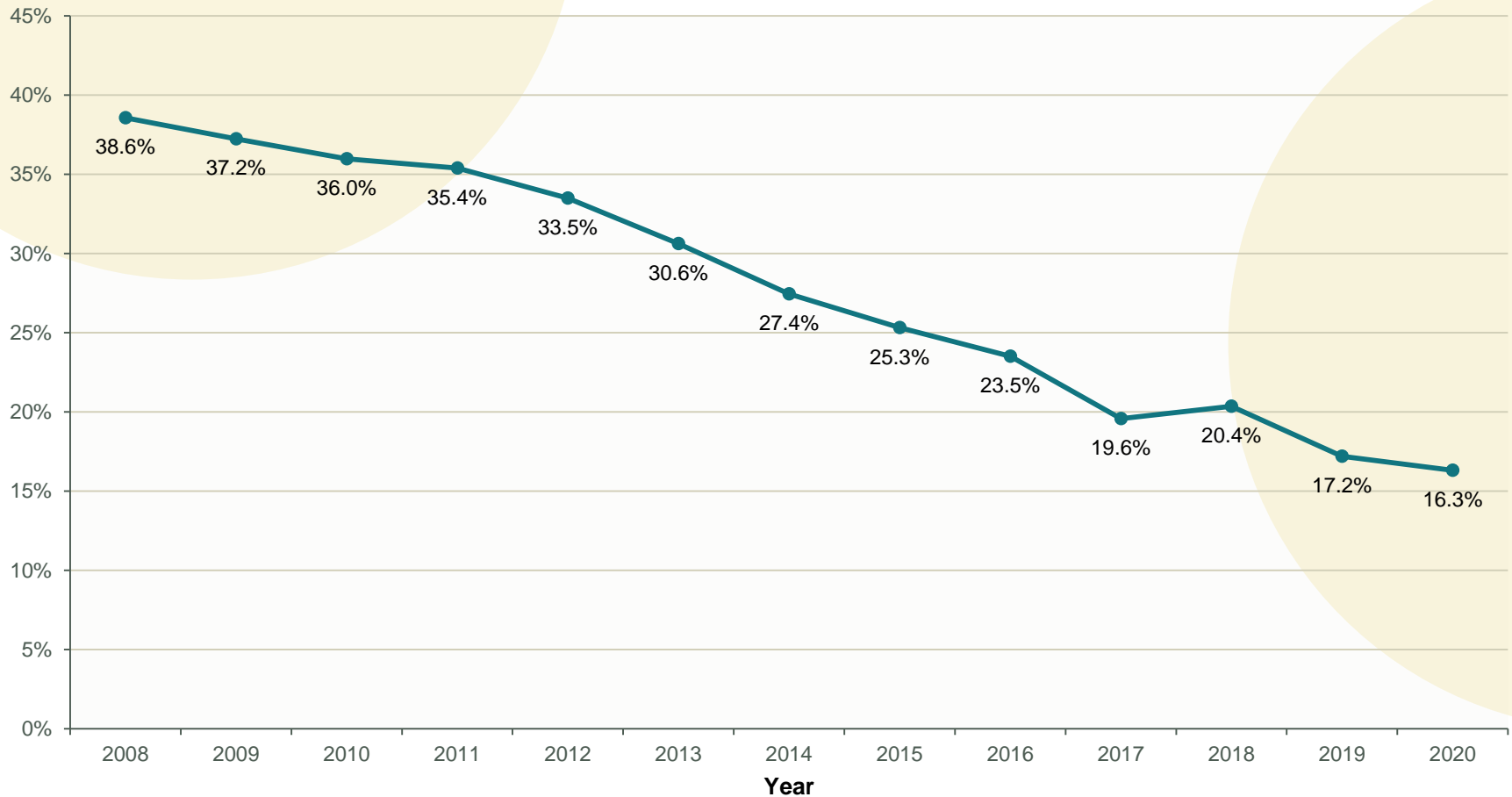
### Average weekly exposure per year – age group



## In 2020, children saw, on average, just under one gambling ad on TV for every five seen by adults

- Children's exposure to gambling ads on TV, relative to adults', has fallen year-on-year from 38.6% in 2008 to 16.3% in 2020, the lowest in the 13-year period.
- That means children saw, on average, just under one TV ad for gambling for every five seen by adults in 2020.

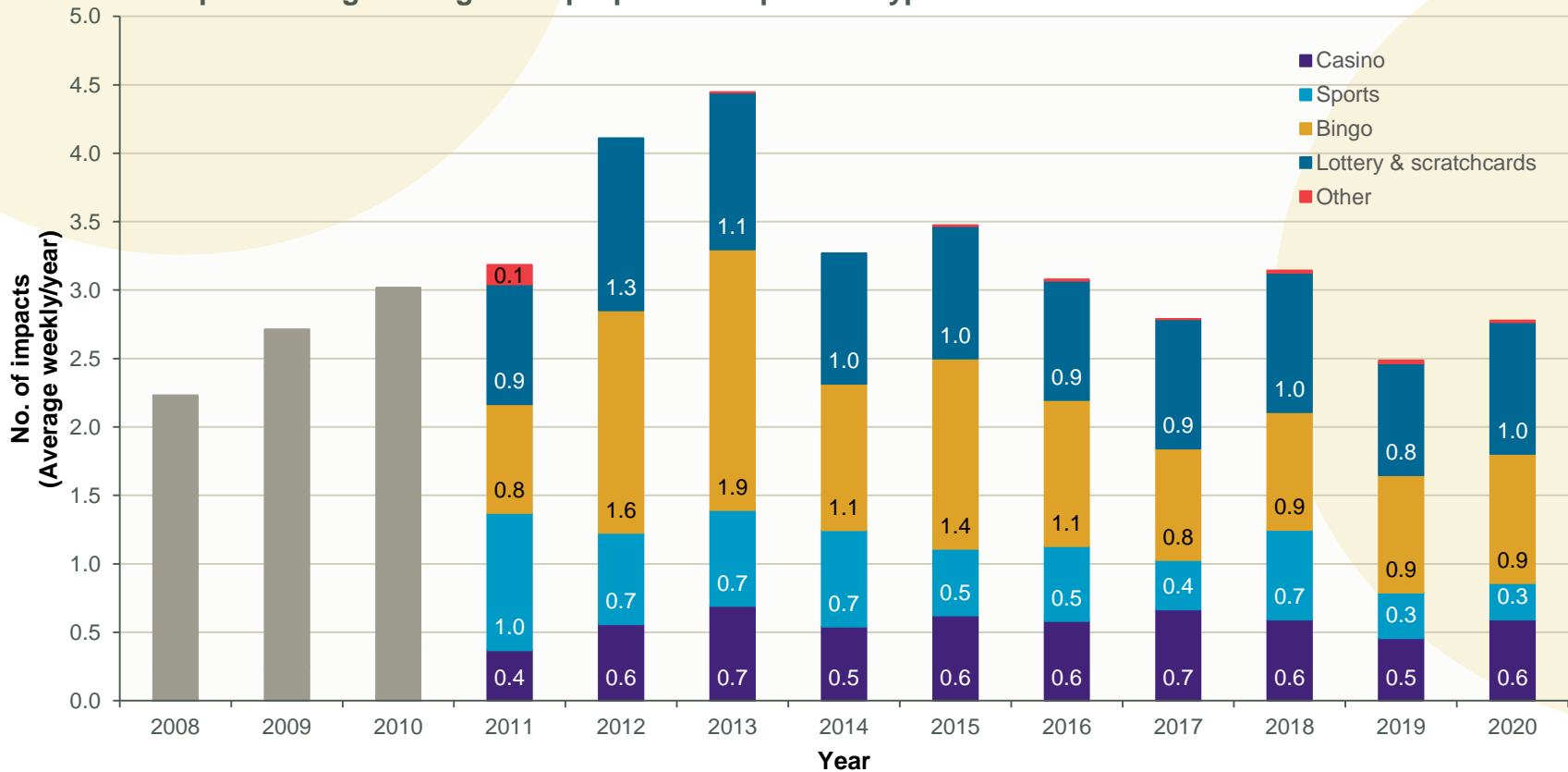
### Children's exposure to alcohol ads as a percentage of adults' exposure



# Majority of TV gambling ads seen by children in 2020 continues to be for bingo, lottery and scratchcards

- Majority of gambling ads seen by children since 2011\* continues to comprise ads for bingo, lottery and scratchcards.
- Children’s exposure to lottery and scratchcard ads on TV increased marginally in 2020 from 2019 but remained at similar levels observed in the seven preceding years. Children’s exposure to bingo ads on TV has remained at similar levels to those observed in the three preceding years.
- Children’s exposure to ads for sports-betting (excluding sponsorships) decreased from a peak in 2011 and has remained at the lowest level over the 10-year period since 2019.

## Children’s exposure to gambling ads – proportion of product types



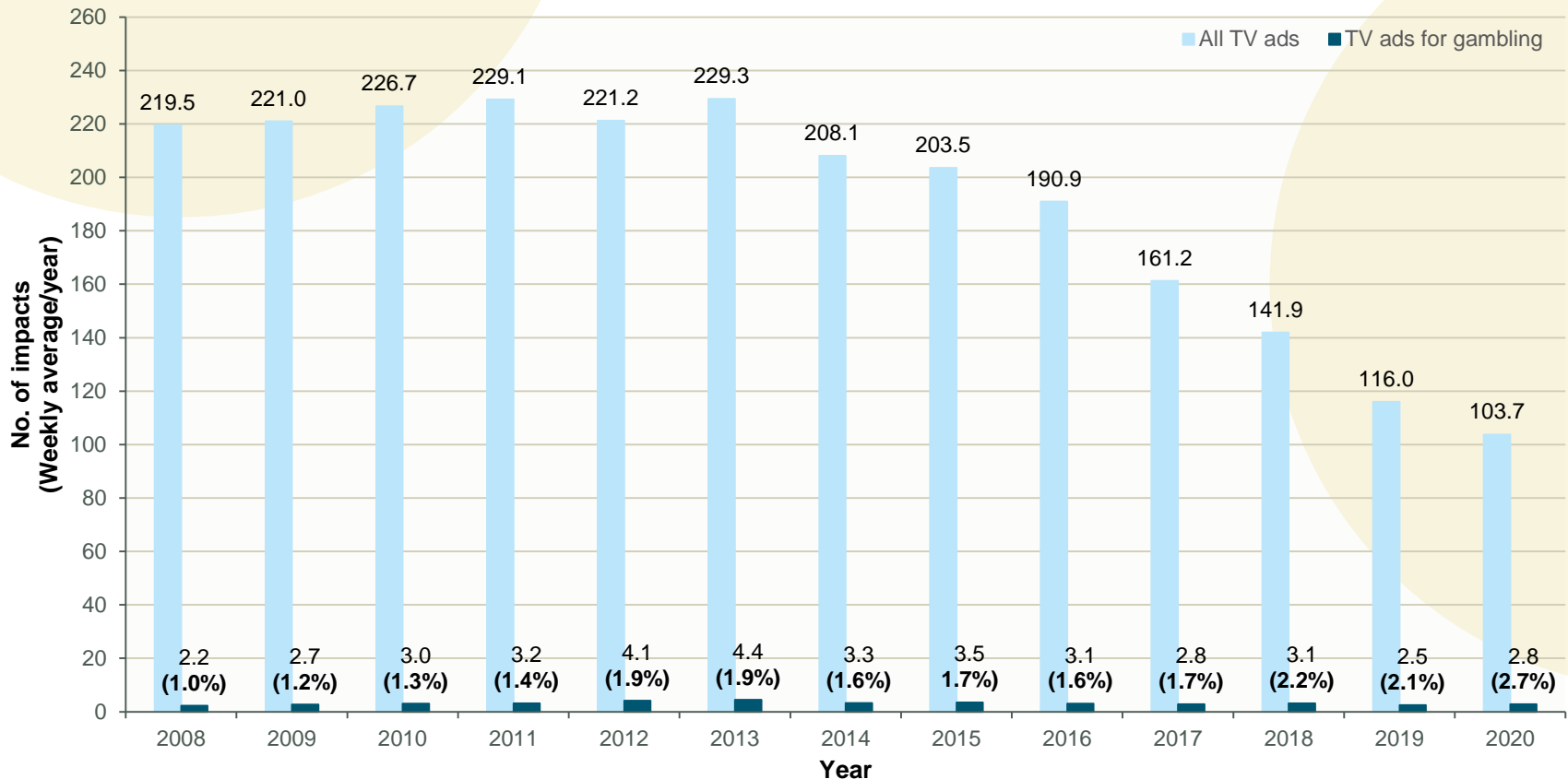
\*Reporting of exposure data for different gambling product categories starts from 2011. As noted in previous ASA exposure reports, product classification data from 2008 to 2010 does not permit a detailed breakdown of children’s exposure to TV ads for bingo, lottery or scratchcards; the overall weekly average impact figures for gambling advertising on TV during the period between 2008 and 2010 remain accurate.



## Gambling ads made up 2.7% of all TV ads seen by children in 2020

- Gambling ads made up less than 2% of all the TV ads that children saw on average every year between 2008 and 2017. This percentage increased marginally to 2.2% in 2018, with a further slight increase to 2.7% in 2020.
- Children's exposure to all TV ads reduced by just over half from a peak of 229.3 ads per week in 2013 to a low of 103.7 ads per week in 2020. Over the same period, children's exposure to gambling ads decreased by just over a third. This suggests that while children's exposure to gambling ads on TV has remained stable at a lower level since a peak in 2013, children's exposure to all TV ads has declined at a faster rate over the same period.

### Children's exposure to all TV ads as a percentage of exposure to all TV ads





**Annex A:**

**How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report**





# How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report

## Data source

- Ad exposure and viewing analysis presented is based on data reported by the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB).
- The data presented considers trends in ad exposure and viewing on broadcast television only and does not include viewing to Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVOD) services.

## Analysis period

- The report calculates ad exposure to alcohol and gambling ads on TV on a weekly average basis for each year from 2008 to 2020.



# How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report

## Measurements

- Principle metric used in measuring ad exposure is **unweighted 'impacts'**.
  - An impact is an instance of advertising being viewed by a member of a demographic group, for example children aged 4-15. As the number of impacts reflects the number of views, 300 impacts could be one ad viewed 300 times, or 300 ads viewed once each, or any similar combination.
  - The analysis for adults' and children's exposure is presented as a weekly average per individual for a given year: the number of impacts divided by the number of adults or children in the UK for a particular week, averaged across the year.
  - Ad exposure data is reported as the average number of impacts per person. This is an important measure as it tells us, on average, how many times per week an average member of the demographic group is exposed to TV ads for the chosen category.



# How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report

We are mindful that concerns about children's exposure to age-restricted advertising relate both to the ads they receive (and the discrete messages those ads include) and the amount of time those ads (and the messages they include) take up in the schedule.

To be as transparent as possible in our account of children's exposure to those categories of advertising, we report on the number of impacts and the length of time over which exposure took place. Readers will note that, at various points in the individual product category sections of the report, these two measures may fluctuate at different rates – the number of messages may go down while the amount of time goes up, or vice versa. The variance is generally modest in scale. The **average number of impacts (based on unweighted impacts) remains the principal metric** used in this report; the values denoting the number of seconds (calculated based on duration weighted impacts) are indicative of the likely length of exposure and are provided for context only.



# How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report

## Other measures used in this report

- **Total ad impacts** – This measure indicates the number of times ads across all product categories are viewed. The number of total ad impacts in this report relates to children aged between 4-15 years, unless otherwise specified, and is presented as a weekly average per year.
- **Children's exposure as a percentage of adults' exposure** – The BCAP scheduling rules result in advertising being targeted away from children's channels or programming and other programming where they are proportionally over-represented in the audience. This measure provides an insight into the efficiency of restrictions intended to appropriately limit children's exposure to ads for certain product categories. For example, if children's exposure as a percentage of adults' exposure to an ad for a particular product is 25%, it means that children see around one of those ads for every four seen by adults.
- **Children's exposure as a percentage of exposure to all TV ads** – This measure shows how much of all the TV ads seen by children are made up of ads for alcohol or gambling, expressed as a percentage.



# How BARB data is analysed and presented in this report

## Audience demographics

- Adults – defined as by BARB as aged 16+
- Children – defined by BARB as aged 4-15 years; further analysis have been included to examine exposure levels for younger children, aged 4-9, and older children, aged 10-15.

**Note:** Exposure figures presented within this report have been rounded to one decimal place, unless set out otherwise. Any percentages set out related to increases and decreases in exposure levels, as well as total figures, in a given period are calculated based on unrounded impact figures for accuracy, and those percentages are then rounded to one decimal place when presented in the report. As such, readers may find a variance if calculating using the rounded figures within this report.

BARB data is continuously consolidated and finessed, and this may account for some minor discrepancies in some of the figures presented in this report and in previous reports.



# Annex B: Further information

When considering the data presented in this report, readers should also refer to important contextual information set out in our [first exposure report](#), in particular following:

- **BCAP's policy objectives and delegated statutory duties (page 5)**
- **Scheduling rules: determining 'particular appeal' of programmes (page 6)**
- **Q&A (page 35)**

**BCAP guidance on [scheduling and audience indexing](#)** aims to help broadcasters comply with the scheduling rules in Section 32 of the BCAP Code. It outlines a variety of approaches, which broadcasters might be expected by the ASA to follow as part of their scheduling policies. They ensure that those programmes that appeal particularly to children and young people are correctly identified, allowing broadcasters to place restrictions on the advertisements in the commercial breaks during and adjacent to them.



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