



Food advertising to children on TV: an open call for evidence

An open call for evidence

Today, the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) is announcing an open call for evidence to assist in its regulation of TV advertising for food and soft drink high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS). BCAP will evaluate the latest evidence and publish its analysis in the autumn.

Why now?

As the UK Government reviews progress of its childhood obesity plan and considers whether further action is needed, BCAP considers it's important to provide up-to-date analysis of the latest evidence. This is particularly important in the light of various recent calls for tougher advertising restrictions.

The current TV rules

The rules ban the scheduling of HFSS product ads next to TV programmes commissioned for or that appeal particularly to children; in short, if the proportion of children in the TV audience is greater than the proportion of children in the population, the programme is said to have particular appeal to children. The rules also restrict the content of HFSS product ads to ensure they don't encourage poor nutritional habits and don't appeal inappropriately to younger children. The rules ban HFSS product promotions and the use of licensed characters and celebrities in ads directed through their content at primary school children.

These rules were introduced over a decade ago in response to evidence of TV advertising's modest direct effect on children's immediate food preferences and in response to a societal imperative to reduce the number and change the nature of food advertisements seen by children.

What impact have they had?

Children's exposure to TV HFSS product ads reduced by 37% between 2005 and 2009. New data suggests that trend has continued, with children's exposure to all TV food and soft drink ads 40% lower than it was in 2010. The Advertising Standards Authority is currently undertaking the first dedicated analysis of children's exposure to TV ads for HFSS products since 2010 and it will publish the results in the summer.

Given advertising's limited influence on children's food preferences, BCAP hasn't seen and didn't expect to see a corresponding reduction in childhood obesity rates; these remain stubbornly high. It's widely acknowledged that socio-economic circumstances, parental choices, school policies, sedentary pastimes, levels of understanding about nutrition and the availability of HFSS products are the main influences on our children's waistlines.

Nevertheless, it's important for advertising regulation to continue play its part. Looking again at the most up to date evidence to test our position is timely.

Key evidence

We welcome evidence relevant to children and the advertising of food and soft drinks on TV, particularly where it takes into account the TV rules that have been in place for over a decade and which remain some of the strictest in the world. More specifically, we'd welcome evidence that updates and improves BCAP's understanding of:



- the public health benefits associated with restrictions on the scheduling and content of TV HFSS products ads;
- trends in children's exposure to ads for food and soft drink advertising on TV (how many ads and what types of content and messages they're seeing) and their impact on children (in terms of immediate behaviour, dietary preferences, actual consumption and longer-term links to health);
- the net cost to broadcasters and advertisers of banning ads for HFSS products in parts of the linear TV schedule not restricted by the current rules; and
- the appropriateness of the policy underpinning the present rules: to reduce children's exposure to TV HFSS ads, while avoiding intrusive regulation into adult viewing time.

Submitting your evidence

BCAP provides a [document](#) to support stakeholders' submission of evidence, including for those who wish to argue for regulatory change or to better understand BCAP and CAP's approach to policy-making. Submissions should be sent to childrensfood@cap.org.uk by 16 May 2018.

Related activities of interest to readers

Public Health England is consulting on a new nutrient profiling model. On completion of this work, BCAP and CAP have committed to reviewing the suitability of the new model for classifying HFSS product advertising and non-HFSS product advertising.

CAP has set out the terms and the timings of its twelve month review of rules that ban HFSS product ads in non-broadcast children's media, including in TV-like media online like catch-up TV and online video platforms. It will evaluate the effectiveness of the new restrictions in delivering comprehensive protections that reflect the reality of children's multi-media lives.