# UK government delays ban on advertising less healthy foods until 2026 amid industry pushback



In a significant policy shift, the UK government has postponed the implementation of a ban on advertising “less healthy foods” until January 2026, extending the deadline from the previously scheduled date of 1 October 2025. This change has been attributed to feedback from industry stakeholders, particularly brands and broadcasters, who raised concerns over the proposed restrictions on advertising practices. The government’s announcement comes as part of ongoing efforts to address childhood obesity and related health issues, a commitment that has persisted through various administrations.

Ashley Dalton, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Public Health and Prevention, confirmed that the government plans to introduce a Statutory Instrument (SI) to clarify that brand advertising may be exempt from the restrictions, as long as it does not promote specific unhealthy food products. The Labour administration has issued assurances that, despite the delay, it anticipates compliance with the proposed restrictions from 1 October 2025. This includes a commitment by advertisers and broadcasters to curtail advertisements for identifiable less healthy products before the 9pm watershed and online altogether.

Health experts have long warned that the advertising of unhealthy foods heavily influences children's dietary choices from a young age. The government emphasised the need to mitigate childhood obesity, which it states costs the NHS significant amounts each year. According to a spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care, “obesity robs children of the best start in life” and that the forthcoming advertising restrictions are a crucial component of their broader public health strategy aimed at fostering a healthier environment for children.

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF), which represents various industry stakeholders, welcomed the government’s clarification, suggesting it gives companies the certainty needed for future marketing campaigns. A spokesperson for the FDF stated that they are committed to adhering to the voluntary pledges made in unison with the government, indicating an open dialogue between regulators and industry. Conversely, the body received criticism from health advocacy organisations, which have expressed concerns that the legislative changes could create loopholes that might still allow for brand advertisements, potentially undermining the original intentions of the restrictions.

The policy’s historical context reveals a series of delays that originated from a broader stress on the food industry due to the economic pressures resulting from the pandemic and more recently, the cost-of-living crisis. The previous Conservative government had initially proposed a ban in 2022, but multiple extensions raised doubts among health advocates regarding the government’s commitment to prioritising public health over industry pressures. Katharine Jenner from the Obesity Health Alliance described the delays as "disappointing," asserting that the postponements reflect a submission to lobbying from food companies rather than a focus on children's health.

Given that both progressive and conservative governments have echoed the need for such advertising bans, the current government must navigate the delicate balance between bolstering industry growth and addressing profound public health issues. Campaigners have argued that any ambiguity in the implementation of advertising restrictions risks undermining the substantial potential benefits of the policy. Sonia Pombo, head of impact and research at Action on Salt, voiced her discontent with the government’s latest delay, calling it "beyond disappointing" and a continuation of a trend where public health initiatives yield to corporate interests.

As the government gears up to finalise the revised legislation, a collaborative effort among various stakeholders, including advertisers, broadcasters, and health advocates, will be critical in ensuring the restrictions not only come into force but also achieve their intended outcomes. The announcement marks another chapter in the ongoing dialogue around public health and corporate responsibility, illuminating the complexities inherent in legislating against the backdrop of economic considerations.

The emphasis now lies in whether the government can maintain momentum in its commitment to public health while still addressing the valid concerns voiced by the industry.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 6
3. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5
4. Paragraphs 1, 4, 6
5. Paragraphs 2, 4, 5
6. Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
7. Paragraphs 1, 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.just-food.com/news/junk-food-advert-ban-delayed-again-but-with-labour-government-caveats/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/a4a5d5f8-a3b7-4073-a41d-01fd23581d64> - The UK government has announced a delay in implementing a ban on junk food advertising before 9pm, originally scheduled to take effect on October 1, 2025. The postponement, now extending the enforcement to January 5, 2026, aims to allow changes in guidance so that pure brand advertising—such as using company names without promoting specific high-fat, salt, or sugar (LHF) products—can be excluded from the ban. The delay follows lobbying from food brands and broadcasters, who argued that the initial interpretation by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) threatened brand promotions even when unhealthy products were not featured. While all major retailers have agreed to voluntarily abide by the 9pm restriction from October, health advocates are likely to criticize the revised approach, fearing that brand advertisements could still influence children. The Department of Health emphasized the public health necessity of tackling childhood obesity and confirmed that from January 2026, there will be a legal obligation preventing LHF product ads before 9pm on TV and anytime online.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/08/sunak-faces-backlash-over-delay-to-junk-food-pre-watershed-ads-ban> - Health experts have criticized Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government for delaying plans to ban pre-watershed TV advertising for junk food. The ban, initially set to take effect from January 2023, was postponed to 2025, prompting backlash from health advocates who argue that the delay prioritizes industry interests over children's health. The move has been described as a 'complete betrayal' by campaigners, who emphasize the urgency of addressing childhood obesity through such advertising restrictions.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/ban-on-junk-food-ads-before-9pm-to-come-into-force-next-year-13213403> - The UK government has confirmed that a ban on junk food advertising before 9pm on television will come into effect on October 1, 2025. This decision aligns with the Labour government's commitment to tackle childhood obesity. The ban also includes a total prohibition on paid-for online advertising of junk food. Health Minister Andrew Gwynne stated that the restrictions aim to protect children from exposure to advertising of less healthy food and drinks, which evidence shows influences their dietary preferences from a young age.
5. <https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/news/ban-advertising-junk-food-before-9pm-resurrected> - The UK government has revived plans to ban the advertising of junk food before 9pm, a measure initially introduced by the Health and Care Act 2022 under the previous government. The new restrictions, set to come into force from October 2025, will prohibit advertisements for identifiable high fat, salt, or sugar (HFSS) products on television or on-demand programme services between 5:30am and 9pm. Additionally, there will be an outright ban on paid-for online advertising of such products aimed at UK users. The Labour government has resurrected these rules as part of its pledges during the general election to tackle the UK's health crisis and ban the advertising of junk food to children.
6. <https://gulfnews.com/lifestyle/health-fitness/uk-to-restrict-junk-food-ads-in-childhood-obesity-fight-1.1726234203276> - The UK government has announced plans to ban junk food advertising on television before 9pm and implement a total ban on paid-for online advertising of such products. The measures aim to tackle childhood obesity and were included in the Labour manifesto that won Keir Starmer's Labour a resounding victory in July. The restrictions are set to come into force on October 1, 2025, following a delay from the original implementation date. The announcement aligns with the government's focus on prevention and addressing the crisis in the National Health Service (NHS).
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/sep/12/junk-food-tv-ads-to-be-banned-pre-watershed-in-uk-from-october-2025> - The UK government has confirmed that a ban on junk food advertising before 9pm on television will come into effect on October 1, 2025. This decision aligns with the Labour government's commitment to tackle childhood obesity. Health campaigners have welcomed the move as an overdue restriction on firms' ability to bombard children with ads for their unhealthy food and drink products. The previous Conservative government had pledged to implement the ban but had delayed it twice, citing concerns over the cost of living crisis and the impact on businesses.