# Ministers delay children’s junk food ads ban until 2026 amid industry lobbying



Ministers have announced a significant delay in the implementation of a ban on junk food advertisements targeted at children, now set to be pushed back to January 2026. This decision has ignited considerable outrage among health campaigners and advocates, who argue that it undermines efforts to tackle rising childhood obesity rates.

Originally, the legislation was slated to come into force on 1 October 2025, following a commitment made by the Labour Party in its election manifesto. The ban aimed to prohibit unhealthy food advertising online and on television before 9pm, with the intention of reducing children's exposure to aggressive marketing strategies employed by manufacturers of ultra-processed food (UPF).

However, lobbying by the food industry has influenced this shift. Concerns raised by large food manufacturers centred on the implications of the proposed ban on brand-only advertising that does not explicitly promote high-fat, salt, or sugar items. Consequently, ministers have decided to amend the rules to exempt such brand promotions from the restrictions, thereby allowing companies to advertise their brands without directly featuring unhealthy foods. Ashley Dalton, the Minister for Public Health, clarified the government's position, emphasising that this statutory instrument aims to provide legal clarity for both regulators and the industry, facilitating smoother advertising campaign preparations.

Despite the government's intention to enable consultations on the amended rules, many health experts view the delay as a substantial setback. William Roberts, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for Public Health, described it as a “huge setback” for public health, stating that delaying measures to restrict junk food advertising compromises efforts to facilitate access to healthier choices for children. Similar sentiments were echoed by Nikita Sinclair, head of the children’s health and food programme at Impact on Urban Health, who expressed disappointment at how the decision allows food companies to continue targeting children with unhealthy options.

Wes Streeting, the Health Secretary, has previously condemned the Conservative government's several postponements of similar bans, stating that failing to act on junk food advertising has resulted in significant public health repercussions, ultimately costing the NHS billions. National data underscores the urgency of addressing these issues, revealing alarming statistics about children's health; for example, one in five children in Year 6 is classified as obese, contributing to a public health crisis exacerbated by the prevalence of poor dietary habits.

In addition to the advertising ban, advocates are calling for broader measures to address the issue. Programmes like Chefs in Schools are emerging as proactive efforts to provide healthier meals in schools. However, rising prices of healthy food options alongside the accessibility of cheap junk food continues to challenge initiatives aimed at improving child nutrition, particularly in low-income households that are disproportionately affected by these patterns.

The ongoing discourse surrounding junk food advertising regulation highlights a complex interplay between public health advocacy and industry lobbying. With multiple stakeholders involved, it remains crucial for the government to navigate these tensions carefully and implement effective measures that genuinely promote the health of future generations.

The path ahead is one that will require not only government action but also a commitment from the food industry to prioritise public health over profit. As the UK grapples with a growing obesity epidemic among children, the urgency for decisive action has never been clearer.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8
2. Paragraph 2, 4, 7
3. Paragraph 6, 7
4. Paragraph 1, 5
5. Paragraph 4, 5
6. Paragraph 4, 5

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/22/uk-ban-on-junk-food-adverts-targeting-children-is-delayed-until-next-year> - 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.ft.com/content/b5035c40-a6ed-4a88-8b8e-1e245f1473e9> - The junk food crisis in the UK has led to alarming rates of child obesity, with one in five children classified as obese by Year 6. Initiatives like the Chefs in Schools programme at Mandeville Primary School aim to combat this by providing nutritious meals, improving students' health and academic performance. Rising healthy food prices and cheap, accessible junk food contribute to the problem, especially among low-income families. Government measures like sugar taxes, advertising restrictions, and universal free school meals are being proposed and implemented to address this public health crisis. Campaigners emphasize the need for stronger policies, higher food standards, and better enforcement to ensure children receive nutritious meals, particularly in deprived areas disproportionately affected by the junk food influx.
4. <https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/12/06/here-are-the-facts-about-our-junk-food-ban/> - The UK government is implementing a ban on junk food advertising targeting children, set to take effect in October 2025. This ban will restrict advertising for less healthy food or drink on television between 5.30am and 9.00pm, and paid-for advertising online at any time. The initiative aims to address the rising rates of childhood obesity, with estimates suggesting it will prevent around 20,000 cases of childhood obesity annually. The ban will not affect other types of advertising, such as billboards and outdoor advertising, although existing regulations still apply. The government emphasizes the importance of providing children with healthier choices and reducing their exposure to unhealthy food advertising.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/junk-food-ad-ban-legislation-progresses-to-curb-childhood-obesity> - The UK government has confirmed that a ban on junk food advertising will come into effect in October 2025. The new law will prohibit television adverts for junk food products before the 9pm watershed and ban paid online advertising of such products at any time. This measure is part of the government's strategy to tackle childhood obesity, with expectations that it will remove 7.2 billion calories per year from children's diets and prevent an estimated 20,000 cases of childhood obesity. The legislation aims to provide clarity for businesses and support them in preparing for the upcoming restrictions.
6. <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 adverts before 9pm on television will come into force in October 2025. This decision aligns with the previous Conservative government's commitment to implement the ban, which had been delayed twice. The new Labour government has decided to proceed with the original timeline, aiming to tackle childhood obesity by restricting children's exposure to advertising of less healthy food and drinks. Health Minister Andrew Gwynne emphasized the importance of addressing the problem without further delay and providing clarity for businesses to prepare for the restrictions.