# UK junk food ad ban delay sparks backlash from health advocates over industry influence



The recent announcement by the UK government of a postponement to its ban on junk food advertising before the watershed has elicited a cascade of criticism from health advocates and child welfare groups. Initially scheduled to take effect from October 1, 2025, the ban will now be enforced from January 5, 2026. This delay has sparked concerns that it caters to corporate lobbying efforts and undermines long-term public health goals.

The changes stem from pressure exerted by large food brands and broadcasters, who argued that the original guidelines were excessively broad. They contended that such rules might inadvertently cover brand advertisements even if they do not directly showcase unhealthy products, potentially stifling brand marketing initiatives, especially those tied to seasonal campaigns. However, health experts warn that such concessions weaken the intended impact of the policy, which aims to combat rising childhood obesity rates.

Sonia Pombo, head of impact and research at Action on Salt, expressed her dismay at the government's decision, asserting that it reflects a pattern of capitulation to food industry interests. “These ad restrictions were first discussed more than six years ago and have the potential to greatly improve the health of our children,” she stated, highlighting the ongoing indecision that allows the food industry to exploit operational loopholes. According to her, this extended timeline raises critical questions about the government's commitment to prioritising children’s health, especially given its declaration of intent to foster the healthiest generation of children in history.

Katharine Jenner, director of the Obesity Health Alliance, echoed these sentiments, indicating that the delay mirrors past actions taken by the previous administration. “This government committed in its manifesto... to ending junk food ads targeting children,” she noted, underlining that despite promises, external pressures seem to sway policy decisions. Health advocates are pushing for concrete measures that will substantively address the causes of dietary-related illnesses, rather than merely delaying action.

This isn't the first instance of government indecision on this front. Earlier delays had been cited during a severe cost of living crisis and ongoing consultations with involved industries, suggesting a broader struggle between corporate interests and public health directives. Just last year, Rishi Sunak faced backlash for pushing back a similar advertising ban initially intended for January 2023 due to fears over its impact amid rising inflation and living costs.

As the countdown to the new enforcement date begins, the advertising landscape is witnessing a surge in junk food promotions. With major brands ramping up their marketing efforts, health campaigners are concerned about the potential long-term harm these advertisements could inflict on children, overshadowing the policy's effectiveness once it is finally implemented. The government’s commitment to improving public health will be scrutinised closely as it seeks to justify the delay, with continued pressure from health advocates insisting that meaningful change cannot wait.

As the situation develops, the need for clarity and decisive action within the realm of public health policy remains paramount. The food industry's role in shaping advertising regulations will be a critical point of contention in the forthcoming debates, revealing the complexities of balancing economic interests with the urgent need for healthier living environments.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.talkingretail.com/news/industry-news/delay-to-junk-food-advertising-ban-elicits-groans-from-health-lobby-23-05-2025/> - 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. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/a4a5d5f8-a3b7-4073-a41d-01fd23581d64?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/08/sunak-faces-backlash-over-delay-to-junk-food-pre-watershed-ads-ban> - In December 2022, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faced criticism after the UK government delayed plans for a ban on pre-watershed TV advertising for junk food. The ban, initially set to take effect from January 2023, was postponed to 2025. Health experts and campaigners expressed disappointment, arguing that the delay undermined efforts to combat childhood obesity. The postponement was attributed to concerns over the cost of living crisis and the need for further consultation with the food and advertising industries. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/08/sunak-faces-backlash-over-delay-to-junk-food-pre-watershed-ads-ban?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2022/may/13/uk-delays-ban-on-supermarket-junk-food-deals-and-pre-watershed-ads> - In May 2022, the UK government announced a delay in implementing a ban on 'buy one get one free' deals on junk food and a pre-9pm watershed for TV advertising. The decision to postpone these measures, initially set to take effect in October 2022, was influenced by the ongoing cost of living crisis. Health campaigners criticized the delay, emphasizing the urgency of addressing the nation's obesity problem. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2022/may/13/uk-delays-ban-on-supermarket-junk-food-deals-and-pre-watershed-ads?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bmj.com/content/early/2025/04/09/bmj.r667> - An investigation by The BMJ revealed that plans to ban junk food adverts from bus stops and billboards are being hindered by advertising industry lobbying. Councils have been warned of significant revenue losses if they implement such bans, leading some to delay or abandon the measures. Experts call for a national ban on out-of-home junk food ads to protect public health. ([bmjgroup.com](https://bmjgroup.com/bans-on-outdoor-junk-food-ads-derailed-by-industry-lobbying/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/12/big-brands-send-out-barrage-of-junk-food-ads-before-obesity-rules-bite> - Ahead of the upcoming ban on junk food advertising before 9pm, major food brands have increased their advertising spend, particularly in outdoor and digital media. This surge aims to maximize exposure before the regulations take effect. Health campaigners express concern that such tactics undermine efforts to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/12/big-brands-send-out-barrage-of-junk-food-ads-before-obesity-rules-bite?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.marketingweek.com/junk-food-ad-ban-wrong-policy/> - The UK government's decision to delay the ban on junk food advertising before the 9pm watershed has been met with mixed reactions. While some in the advertising industry welcome the additional time to prepare, they argue that the ban is still the 'wrong policy' and will not effectively tackle obesity. Health groups, on the other hand, have criticized the delay, calling it 'disgraceful' and urging the government to implement the ban as planned. ([marketingweek.com](https://www.marketingweek.com/junk-food-ad-ban-wrong-policy/?utm_source=openai))