# UK prepares for tougher online advertising regulations to combat childhood obesity from January 2026



From early January 2026, stricter regulations will come into force in the UK, barring advertisements for “identifiable” less healthy food (LHF) products from appearing on television and online platforms before 9pm, according to new government-backed rules. The regulations, overseen by the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP and BCAP), apply to Ofcom-regulated TV and on-demand services and extend to paid-for online advertising. This move targets products high in fat, salt, or sugar (HFSS) as part of efforts to tackle childhood obesity and related health issues.

The government has opened a three-week consultation inviting brands and stakeholders to provide comprehensive feedback on the proposed LHF advertising restrictions before the consultation closes in mid-October. While brand advertising will be exempt from some of the new rules—and government data suggests this exemption led to a delay in enforcement from October 2025 to January 2026—advertisers have committed voluntarily to comply with the restrictions from October this year. Industry bodies including the Advertising Association, ISBA, IPA, and IAB UK have launched a joint campaign urging full adherence to the agreement, framing compliance as a matter of trust with the public and policymakers.

The LHF advertising restrictions are detailed, prohibiting not only explicit naming and packaging of less healthy products but also any implied or indirect references. This includes depictions in artistic or cartoon form, and branded associations that could identify an LHF variant. Influencers are similarly restricted from naming or showing recognisable less healthy products in their content, though organic posts without paid promotion are allowed. Advertisers may continue posting on their own channels provided they avoid paid promotion of these products. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) will gain full legal powers to enforce these rules from January 2026, following interim monitoring and ongoing sanctions of breaches.

Public health research underpins the rationale for the ban. A study by Cancer Research UK highlighted that over half of young people have encountered junk food marketing on social media within recent weeks, with influencer posts proving particularly influential in driving engagement. The study’s findings lend weight to calls for robust enforcement and the closing of loopholes in online marketing regulations to shield children from exposure to HFSS advertising. Cancer Research UK’s prevention policy manager emphasised the need for "bold action" to protect young viewers from harmful marketing tactics.

The ASA has already demonstrated its willingness to act against advertising that breaches existing HFSS rules. Recently, it ruled against a Domino’s Pizza ad promoting an HFSS product during a Minecraft-related YouTube video, concluding the ad was likely to appeal to children—a violation given current restrictions. Despite Domino’s efforts to restrict ad targeting to over-18s, the regulator highlighted the challenge of controlling exposure in media popular with younger audiences.

These new restrictions form part of a wider policy framework outlined by the government, which includes detailed guidance on product definitions, exemptions, and enforcement mechanisms. The goal is to reduce childhood obesity and long-term health problems such as diabetes and heart disease by limiting exposure to unhealthy food advertising, including in digital spaces where children increasingly spend their time.

In summary, the forthcoming regulations mark an important step in the UK’s public health strategy by restricting less healthy food advertising in both traditional and online media. Industry cooperation, regulatory oversight, and public health advocacy are converging to impose tighter controls designed to protect young audiences from the influence of junk food marketing.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restricting-advertising-of-less-healthy-food-or-drink-on-tv-and-online-products-in-scope), [[7]](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/advertising/regulation-of-less-healthy-food-and-drink-advertising/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/brand-advertising-exemption-from-advertising-restrictions-for-less-healthy-food-or-drink), [[6]](https://www.asa.org.uk/news/further-consultation-on-the-implementation-of-new-rules-on-ads-for-less-healthy-food-and-drink-products.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[6]](https://www.asa.org.uk/news/further-consultation-on-the-implementation-of-new-rules-on-ads-for-less-healthy-food-and-drink-products.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/junk-food-ad-ban-legislation-progresses-to-curb-childhood-obesity), [[6]](https://www.asa.org.uk/news/further-consultation-on-the-implementation-of-new-rules-on-ads-for-less-healthy-food-and-drink-products.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/junk-food-ad-ban-legislation-progresses-to-curb-childhood-obesity)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/less-healthy-food-or-drink-advertising-and-promotions-restrictions), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/junk-food-ad-ban-legislation-progresses-to-curb-childhood-obesity)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/less-healthy-food-or-drink-advertising-and-promotions-restrictions), [[6]](https://www.asa.org.uk/news/further-consultation-on-the-implementation-of-new-rules-on-ads-for-less-healthy-food-and-drink-products.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.marketingweek.com/consultation-less-healthy-food-ad-ban/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/brand-advertising-exemption-from-advertising-restrictions-for-less-healthy-food-or-drink> - The UK government has announced a consultation on exempting 'brand advertising' from restrictions on advertising less healthy food or drink products. This move aims to provide clarity on the application of advertising restrictions, particularly concerning brand advertising, ahead of the restrictions coming into effect on 5 January 2026. The consultation seeks feedback on the draft regulations to ensure they are fit for purpose and align with the government's policy intentions.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restricting-advertising-of-less-healthy-food-or-drink-on-tv-and-online-products-in-scope> - This guidance outlines the provisions of the Advertising (Less Healthy Food Definitions and Exemptions) Regulations 2024, which will come into force on 5 January 2026. It details the products, businesses, and services in scope of the restrictions, how products will be defined as less healthy, exemptions to the policy, and how the restrictions will be implemented and enforced. The document aims to assist businesses and authorities in understanding and applying the regulations.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/less-healthy-food-or-drink-advertising-and-promotions-restrictions> - This collection provides information about regulations restricting the advertising and promotion of less healthy food or drink, also known as foods high in fat, salt, or sugar. It includes details on advertising restrictions for less healthy food or drink on television and online, restricting promotions of less healthy food or drink by location and by volume price, and other related consultations and guidance. The collection aims to support businesses and regulators in implementing these restrictions.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/junk-food-ad-ban-legislation-progresses-to-curb-childhood-obesity> - The UK government has confirmed the final details of advertising restrictions on junk food, set to take effect from October 2025. The new law prohibits TV adverts for junk food products before the 9pm watershed and bans paid online junk food adverts to reduce children's exposure to foods high in fat, sugar, or salt. This initiative aims to address rising rates of obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease among children.
6. <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/further-consultation-on-the-implementation-of-new-rules-on-ads-for-less-healthy-food-and-drink-products.html> - The Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP and BCAP), on behalf of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), are conducting a further consultation on the implementation of new restrictions on food and drink advertising to children. The less healthy product advertising rules will come into effect from October 2025, prohibiting ads for 'identifiable' less healthy products from being included in Ofcom-regulated TV services and on-demand programme services between 5:30am and 9:00pm, and from being placed in paid-for space in online media at any time.
7. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/advertising/regulation-of-less-healthy-food-and-drink-advertising/> - Ofcom, the statutory regulator responsible for advertising on TV and on-demand programme services, has outlined the new restrictions on advertising for less healthy food and drink products. These restrictions, set to take effect from 1 October 2025, include prohibiting Ofcom-regulated TV services and on-demand programme services from including advertising and sponsorship for less healthy food and drink products between 5:30am and 9pm, and prohibiting paid-for advertisements for less healthy food and drink products aimed at UK users from being placed online at any time.