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BSPD welcomes ban on online advertising of 'harmful' foods

The announcement in the Queen's Speech this month that advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) is to be restricted from April of next year is welcomed by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry.

New legislation will introduce an outright ban on online promotions and a watershed of 9pm for TV advertisements; BSPD hopes the restrictions will reduce children's exposure to advertising of products that are contributing to unacceptably high levels of childhood obesity and dental decay, especially in areas of greatest deprivation(1).

In our response to a consultation (2) last year we set out the reasons why HFSS food and drinks are detrimental at an individual level as well as having a wider long-term societal impact. Children and young people are currently consuming up to three times the recommended sugar intake, increasing their risk of dental decay, obesity and other chronic health conditions such as Type 2 diabetes (3).

The evidence underpinning our consultation response was developed into a position statement (4) by two of our members, Laura Warrilow and Jessica Large. They highlighted that children are spending more time online, a trend exacerbated during the pandemic, when schools were closed.

Due to shared risk factors, there is a clear link between obesity and dental caries as set out in an earlier BSPD position statement (5), which is why they must be addressed together.

BSPD spokesperson Claire Stevens said: “I am delighted that the Government has listened to all the organisations that have been campaigning for advertising of junk food and drink to be restricted. April 2022 cannot arrive soon enough.”

“Frequent snacking of foods which are high in sugar leads to children and young people being at high risk of dental decay. Currently there are too many products which are marketed at children claiming to be good for growing children because they have “no added sugar” but are laden with hidden sugars as well as salt and fat.”

“Our advice to parents and carers is to seek out products which contribute to a balanced diet and combine with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, while keeping any sugar-containing food and drink to mealtimes.”

“We would like a general reformulation of products to make the foods on shop shelves healthier as well as a complete overhaul of food labelling, so that it’s easier for parents to assess which food products are the most nutritious.”

“Along with Jamie Oliver, Public Health England, Sustain and a plethora of other organisations wanting to reduce obesity and dental decay in children, we have been at war on sugar (6) for years. The sugar levy has had a positive impact, but more steps are needed. We would like to see greater incentivisation of healthy food and drink choices to protect our children’s oral health.”

References:

1.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844121/BMI_dental_caries.pdf

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-public-consultation-on-total-ban-of-online-advertising-for-unhealthy-foods>
3. GOV.UK. Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s – consultation document – GOV.UK.2019
4. <https://www.bspd.co.uk/Professionals/Resources/Position-Statements>
5. <https://www.bspd.co.uk/Portals/0/Obesity%20and%20Dental%20Health%20Final%20PS%20Final%20Dec%202020.pdf>
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/views-from-the-nhs-frontline/2017/apr/10/surge-dental-surgery-children-nhs-consultant-dentistry>