



6 in 10 food adverts during family TV shows push junk food, new study reveals

In the worst case, children were exposed to nine junk food adverts in just 30 minutes, says Obesity Health Alliance report

Almost 6 in 10 (59%) food and drinks adverts shown during programmes watched by hundreds of thousands of children every week are for products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) – and in some cases, children can see up to nine junk food adverts in just 30 minutes, according to new analysis published today.

The study commissioned by the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) and conducted by the University of Liverpool analysed adverts shown before and during some of the most popular TV programmes on ITV, Channel 4 and E4 between 6pm-9pm (when the number of children watching TV peaks). The Voice, Ninja Warriors, The Simpsons, Coronation Street and Hollyoaks were chosen due to the high numbers of children watching them. Researchers used official Government guidelines to assess whether the advert would have been allowed to be shown during children's programming (where a ban on advertising junk food is currently in place).

The study found:

- The majority (59%) of food and drink adverts would be banned from kids' TV
- In the worst example, children were being bombarded with **nine junk food adverts in just 30 minutes**
- **Adverts for fast food and takeaways were shown over twice as often** as any other type of food and drinks advert
- **Adverts for fruit and vegetables made up just over 1%** of the food and drinks adverts shown during family viewing time

The OHA, a coalition of over 40 health charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups is calling for a 9pm watershed to protect children from junk food marketing plus a ban on brands associated with junk food products sponsoring programmes popular with children.

The study findings are particularly startling when looking at individual programmes and products. For example:

- An episode of Hollyoaks on E4 watched by an average of 140,000 children during the study period, showed a total of nine HFSS adverts in just 30 minutes. These included adverts for McDonalds, Domino's pizza, Haribo and Oreo

- During ITV's flagship prime-time show 'The Voice', watched by an average of 731,000 children every episode during the study period, 75% of all food and drink adverts shown would likely be banned from children's TV

Professor Mary Fewtrell, Nutrition Lead at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said:

"This report is another grim reminder why we're losing the fight against the scourge of childhood obesity. We know brand recognition influences children's behaviours from as young as 18 months – which is why Government saw it fit to ban junk food advertising during children's shows back in 2010. Children are very impressionable and need protection from the hundreds of millions of pounds spent each year on junk food advertising, much of which is within the family viewing hours of 6-9pm. Advertising not only influences what children eat but also how much they eat, and often leads to them pestering parents to buy unhealthy products."

The analysis also highlights how the current rules are failing to protect children as they don't reflect children's TV viewing habits with nearly five times the number of children watching 'family' shows than children's shows. During one particular week of the study, The Voice (which junk food restrictions don't apply to) was the most popular show with children, watched by 918,000 4-15 year olds. This in contrast to the most popular children's show, Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom (where junk food restrictions do apply), which was watched by 195,000 children.

Caroline Cerny, Obesity Health Alliance Lead, said:

"The rules to protect children from junk food advertising on TV are ten years old. They weren't strong enough then and they are definitely not fit for purpose now as they only cover 27% of children's viewing time.

"The Government has laid a foundation with their Childhood Obesity Plan, but now it's time to go further with decisive action to stop children being bombarded with adverts for junk food with a 9pm watershed."

The latest obesity statistics show that one in three children in England are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school. Obese children are five times more likely to become obese adults and risk developing devastating diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease plus mental health problems.

Ends.

For a copy of report, or to speak to an OHA spokesperson, please contact:

Melissa Milner Melissa.milner@rcpch.ac.uk / 0207 092 6005

Or

Caroline Cerny caroline.cerny@ukhealthforum.org.uk / 020 7832 6928

Channel and Programme	Average number of child viewers per episode in study period ¹	Total food and drink adverts shown in study period	Total HFSS adverts shown in study period	Proportion of HFSS food and drink adverts shown (as percentage of all food and drink adverts shown) %
ITV – The Voice	731,625	60	45	75
CH4 – The Simpsons	239,375	24	14	58
E4 - Hollyoaks	140,225	40	26	65
ITV – Coronation Street (7.30 and 8.30 episode combined)	350,975	37	16	43
ITV – Ninja Warriors	695,500	13	1	8
Totals		174	102	
Average				59%

¹ Average taken from number of children watching each episode across the four to five week study period. BARB data was captured on a weekly basis from Thinkbox - <http://www.thinkbox.tv/Research/Barb-data/Top-programmes-report?tag=Kids>