

Date: 13th October 2011



75% Irish parents support ban of unhealthy food ads up to 9pm

Views submitted for consultation to Broadcasting Authority on Children's Code

Over half of Irish parents support a ban on advertising unhealthy foods to children before 9pm with a further 20% or 1 in 5 supporting a complete ban.

The **Irish Heart Foundation**, **Children's Rights Alliance** and the **National Youth Council of Ireland** commissioned this survey with Red C¹ as part of their submissions to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Consultation on the Children's Commercial Communications Code².

In the Red C poll, just over 2 in 5 parents claimed to be aware that the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is considering restricting the advertising of unhealthy foods, i.e. foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) to children via Irish television channels.

Over half of all parents with dependant children under the age of 18 years are concerned about TV advertising of unhealthy foods to children and over 4 in 5 parents believe that TV advertising influences food choice in children.

Speaking on behalf of the Irish Heart Foundation, the national charity fighting heart disease and stroke, Maureen Mulvihill, Health Promotion Manager, said: "As almost 3 out of 5 parents were not aware of this consultation and therefore the opportunity to protect the health of their children, it was very important to capture the views of Irish parents. Their views strongly support our submission to the BAI, which calls for a ban on advertising of unhealthy foods to children between the hours of 6am to 9pm.

"The appalling reality is that 1 in 4 primary school children and 1 in 5 young people aged 12-17 years are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is strongly linked to risk factors for cardiovascular disease into adulthood (CVD), which is the No 1 killer in Ireland. In addition as set out in the BAI's consultation document, there is strong scientific evidence that links commercial promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages to poor diets in children."

¹ RED C interviewed a random telephone sample of 750 parents of dependent children under the age of 18. Interviewers are nationally representative by gender, age and social class. The margin of error on the sample size is +/- 3.7%. Fieldwork was conducted 12th – 14th September and 19th – 21st September.

² BAI Consultation document: http://www.bai.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/BAI-CCC-Consultation-Document_vfinal_BF.pdf.

Outgoing Chief Executive of Children’s Rights Alliance, Senator Jillian van Turnhout, said: “20% of parents believe junk food advertising has no place on television, with 75% of parents (in total) wishing to see a ban of some sort. This supports our long-held position that parents are our strongest advocates for children’s rights and put their children’s best interests first. The Alliance has long campaigned on the issue of childhood obesity; we awarded the last government an ‘E’ grade for the poor implementation of its policy to reduce childhood obesity in Report Card 2011. Urgent action is required as the childhood obesity epidemic is worsening: children today will be the first generation whose life expectancy, due to levels of childhood obesity, may be shorter than that of their parents. Banning junk food advertising is a key step in our national solution to the problem.”

The National Youth Council of Ireland’s Deiniol Jones said, “We welcome the development of statutory advertising codes by the BAI. However, they must be strong and effective if we are to protect our children and young people from aggressive and pervasive junk food advertising. This survey indicates that 84% of parents acknowledge the influence of advertising and the overwhelming majority believe that restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages are required”.

Summary response to the Consultation

The Irish Heart Foundation, Children’s Rights Alliance (representing over 90 NGOs), the National Youth Council of Ireland (representing over 50 youth organisations) and the National Heart Alliance (representing 25 health organisations) fully and unequivocally accept the recommendations of the Expert Working Group (EWG) as included in the BAI Consultation document www.bai.ie and

- propose that advertising of foods HFSS to children should be restricted between 6am and up to the watershed time of 9pm, as many children watch television outside the period designated children’s programming³. **Note:** The Children’s Rights Alliance call for a total ban on all advertising of foods HFSS.
- propose that the Nutrient Profiling model is an appropriate, specific and scientifically rigorous tool to allow the BAI to readily differentiate between foods HFSS and non HFSS food products. It has been reviewed for effectiveness in relation to food advertising and used successfully by the Broadcasting Regulatory Authority (Ofcom) in the UK.
- propose that consideration be given to the gaps in the UK regulations, whereby children are only protected up to 7pm, despite the fact that more children, as In Ireland, watch family programmes after 7.00pm.
- a pre-watershed ban demands strong support among parents. Such support exists. 55% of Irish parents said they would support a ban of unhealthy food ads up to 9pm and another 20% a total ban.

³ Ipsos Mori (2008) Children’s Advertising Code Attitudinal Survey conducted on behalf of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland. www.bai.ie

- propose an interim review of the Children’s Commercial Communications Code in 2-3 years with specific reference to the impact of advertising of foods HFSS on parents and a full review after 5 years.

For more information see http://www.irishheart.ie/iopen24/marketing-unhealthy-foods-children-t-38_263.html or www.childrensfoodcampaign.com

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