

Energy drinks guidance – Make your voice count!

Banning the sale of energy drinks to children is a key pledge of the current Government, first set out in Labour's election manifesto. To turn this promise into action, the Government has launched a national consultation, inviting views from young people, parents, teachers and other members of the public on how the ban should be introduced and enforced.

[Research indicates](#) that consumption of high-caffeine energy drinks among children is associated with negative health effects such as headaches, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and reduced academic performance. Additionally, children from lower-income backgrounds are more likely to consume these drinks, raising concerns about health inequalities.

At present, high-caffeine energy drinks must carry a clear warning label: *"High caffeine content. Not recommended for children or pregnant or breastfeeding women."* While many major supermarkets have already introduced voluntary bans on sales to under-16s, other retailers and smaller convenience stores often continue to sell them – leaving a clear gap that regulation now aims to close.

Sustain's [Children's Food Campaign](#) and [Bite Back](#) have worked together to bring you this tool and support you in answering the consultation survey questions. Please share it with parents, teachers, and young people and encourage as many people as possible to have their say!

Key Details of the Consultation

- **Consultation Period:** The consultation is open until **11:59 PM on 26 November 2025**.
- **Proposed Measures:**
 - **Minimum age of sale:** The current proposal sets the minimum age for purchasing high-caffeine energy drinks at 16 years, effectively banning sales to children aged 15 and under.
 - **Scope of the ban:** The ban would apply to high-caffeine energy drinks, which typically contain over 150 mg of caffeine per litre, and would apply across to all retailers, extend to vending machines. The proposed ban does not include coffee or tea products.
 - **Implementation timeline:** A six-month period is proposed to allow businesses and enforcement authorities to prepare for the ban.
 - **Enforcement:** Local authorities would be responsible for enforcing the ban, with potential penalties including fixed monetary fines and criminal prosecution for repeat offences.

Parent Insights

- "Energy drinks pose serious health risks to our children. As a parent, it's concerning to see the ingredients in these drinks, the harm it can cause to young people and how it may contribute to rising anxiety levels too." Parent of 12 year old.
- "There should be measures in place for the people who knowingly sell energy drinks to young people." Parent of 6 & 8 year old.
- ["Not suitable for children mean not suitable for children"](#). In this blog, Professor Amelia Lake and parent ambassadors Dr. Rounaq Nayak and Mezreet Rasul discuss the health risks of energy drinks and why banning sales of energy drinks is vital for children's wellbeing.
- [Sustain's polling of 2000 UK parents](#) revealed 8 in 10 parents (80%) support the government banning the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children under 16.

Youth Insights:

- "Energy drinks are cheap, brightly packaged and easier to buy than water. They're aggressively marketed to us, especially online, despite serious health risks. We feel pressured to drink them, especially during exam season, when stress is high and healthier options are hard to find. This ban is a step in the right direction - but bold action on marketing and access must follow." Carrera, Bite Back Youth Activist
- "During exams, I was eating a lot of unhealthy food and drinking energy drinks because it was cheaper and easier than getting a full meal [at school]. I think this affected my performance." Bite Back Youth Activist
- ["Energy Drinks Have Become The Social Currency Of The Playground."](#) - Bite Back activist Clemmie reveals how giant food companies are flooding our world with their unhealthy products and the impact this is having on young people.

Teacher Insights

- [61% of teachers](#) agree or strongly agree that high-caffeine energy drinks negatively impact pupil health & wellbeing.
- [50% of teachers](#) agree or strongly agree that energy drinks negatively affect pupil behaviour and learning.
- [79% of secondary teachers](#) (31% strongly agree + 48% agree) say pupils at their school can easily access energy drinks.
- [NASUWT's Big Question survey](#) of teachers and school leaders across England found that 13% of respondents identified energy drinks as a critical contributor to poor pupil behaviour and a barrier to children and young people engaging effectively with learning.

Guide to answering the consultation survey

Here is the link to the consultation [survey](#). Below are the consultation questions with some suggested wording that reflects our calls. We've also left space to include your specific insight and unique perspective. Feel free to use these suggestions as a guide and respond only to the questions you feel comfortable with or find most relevant to you.

Before asking for your responses to the consultation questions, the survey will give you the option to share some information about yourself. Instruction on how to respond to each question are made clear on each page of the survey, with the key points being:

- Where options are provided to either **agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree**, or don't know, our position is outlined in **bold**, followed by questions to consider and evidences you may want to include
- Responses for **each question** must be a **maximum of 300 words total**.

Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks based on age?

Agree. *I strongly support the Government's proposal to ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children. As a [young person / teacher / parent], I've seen how energy drinks have become a regular part of life for many children and teenagers.*

Questions to think about in your answers:

- **Where do you see energy drinks showing up in young people's lives?** For example, before school, during breaktimes, at sports clubs, or on social media. You may reference any examples of child-appealing marketing.
- **Have you seen any effects of energy drinks on young people's wellbeing?** For example, you may wish to include examples of how you've seen energy drinks affect mental or physical health, such as tiredness, anxiety, or poor concentration
- **How would a legal age restriction help you or your community?** If you work in a school or with young people, you may wish to explain how proper regulation could support you in your work. For example, by helping schools and parents set consistent boundaries, reducing access in shops, and limiting marketing aimed at children.

Evidence you may want to reference:

- High sugar and caffeine levels can affect sleep, concentration, mood, and physical health, leading to headaches, stomach aches, irritability, and anxiety ([Lake & Visram, 2024](#)).
- Frequent consumption is linked not only to physical and mental health concerns but also to poorer school performance ([PubMed, 2022](#)).
- [The GOV.UK Omnibus Survey \(Dec 2024\)](#) found that 26% of 11–14-year-olds and 49% of 14–16-year-olds had consumed an energy drink in the past week; 84% of parents were unaware of their child's consumption.
- Marketing through gaming, sports, and social media strongly influences young people's drink choices [Evans et al. \(2023\)](#).

Do you agree or disagree that the minimum age of sale for high-caffeine energy drinks should be 16 years?

Disagree. The proposed age limit of 16 would not provide suitable protection to children at an important stage of physical, mental, and educational development. The minimum age of sale should be **18**.

Questions to think about in your answers:

- **Why do you think 18 is a more appropriate age limit?** (For example: it aligns with other age-restricted products like alcohol, tobacco, and lottery tickets, and helps send clearer consistent messages to young people.)
- **Where do you see energy drinks showing up among older teenagers?** (For example: on school grounds, before exams, at sports clubs or leisure centres, or in local shops.)
- **How would setting the limit at 18 help schools and communities?** (For example: creating consistency across school years as an under 16 age limit could increase the risk of internal 'black market' transactions between older and younger pupils in secondary schools. Or reducing peer pressure, and making it easier for teachers to enforce rules. Feel free to include specific stories about energy drinks, when and how they are consumed eg exam time.)

Evidence you may want to reference:

- The minimum age of sale should be set at 18. This aligns with the UK's legal definition of a child, which is anyone under 18 ([NSPCC Learning](#)).
- [Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland](#) have already legislated a ban on sale of energy drinks at 18.
- Evidence from tobacco laws shows that a higher age limit helps reduce normalisation, makes harmful products less available to younger people, and supports clear messages for parents, schools, and retailers, ([Khan Review, 2022](#)).
- With the highest levels of energy drink consumption found among Key Stage 4 students ([Gov, 2024](#)), setting a sales limit at 16 would leave many pupils preparing for GCSEs unprotected.

Do you agree or disagree that the ban should apply to any drink, other than tea or coffee, that contains over 150 milligrams of caffeine per litre?

Agree. The ban should apply to all high-caffeine energy drinks as defined by Food Standards Agency and/or outlined in the consultation document to protect children from both the harmful effects of excess caffeine and sugar content.

Do you agree or disagree that the ban should apply to all sellers, retailers and businesses, both in store and online, who operate in England?

Agree. I strongly agree that the ban should apply to all sellers, retailers, and businesses, both in store and online, who operate in England. While voluntary codes (for example through the Association of Convenience Stores) and guidance for vending machines exist - these are unenforceable, inconsistently applied, and have not demonstrably reduced availability to young people. A legal age limit would make sure all shops follow the same rules, so young people are equally protected wherever they live. It would also bring energy drinks in line with other products that have age limits, sending a clear and consistent message about health and safety.

Questions to think about in your answers:

- **What is it like in your local area and/or around your school?** For example: Are energy drinks easy to buy nearby? What kind of shops sell them and how common are they? Are there places beyond shops where energy drinks are sold, e.g. your local sports stadium, theme park?
- Often in areas with higher levels of deprivation, the high street is flooded with convenience stores and takeaways that offer unhealthy options, including energy drinks. **[Does this reflect what you see where you live and/or go to school and, if so, can you share any examples or stories?]**

Do you think that this proposal would be likely to have an impact on people who share a protected characteristic in a way that is different from those who do not share it? And, if so, which protected characteristics do you think this applies to?

The proposed age of sale restriction primarily applies to age, protecting children and teenagers from the harmful effects of high-caffeine energy drinks, especially those packed with sugar.

- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

[From your own experience and perspective, are there any ways this proposal might impact the protected characteristics listed above? You may wish to share any relevant examples, observations or reflections (please keep responses within 250 words)]

Other questions

Please note there are further questions that are optional and it is up to you whether you would like to answer them. Respondents may wish to use this section to provide any further observations regarding the **advertising, branding, and labelling** of energy drinks.

For example, comments could address:

- The **visibility and clarity** of existing warning labels;
- The **association between energy drink marketing and sports or activities** that are particularly popular among teenagers;
- Other aspects of **promotion or presentation** that may influence consumer awareness or perceptions.

If you would like any support or suggested copy for these questions, please email naema@sustainweb.org

Next Steps

Once the consultation has closed, the Government will review all submissions and publish its response online, which will include any changes to the proposal.