

## Press release



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## **Voluntary controls on junk food ads endangers children's health**

In the Public Health White Paper, it is said that the Government will set out its preferred option for voluntary controls on junk food advertising to children [1]. But Sustain's Children's Food Bill campaign argues that each year that legislation is delayed, an estimated 40,000 children will become obese [2].

It is now more than ten years since Sustain first called upon the industry to show social responsibility in its food promotion to children [3], a call which has recently been repeated by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) [4], the House of Commons Health Committee [5] and the Chief Medical Officer [6]. However, in spite of the overwhelming support from parents [7], and health and obesity charities [8], industry has probably increased rather than restricted their unhealthy marketing to children [9].

The Children's Food Bill was introduced to Parliament by Debra Shipley MP in May this year and is already supported by 241 cross-party MPs and 122 national organisations [10]. The Bill will introduce a range of statutory measures - rather than ineffective voluntary rules - which will improve children's food, children's diets and their current and future health. These include:

- protecting children from the marketing of unhealthy food and drink products
- improving standards to ensure that all school meals are healthy
- banning the sale of unhealthy food and drinks from school vending machines
- teaching food education and practical food skills, such as cooking and growing, to all children
- ensuring the government promotes healthy foods, like fruit and vegetables, to children

Charlie Powell, Campaign Co-ordinator at Sustain explained, "*Junk food advertising to children is intense, relentless and exploitative and the Government should legislate now. The Children's Food Bill would not only protect children, but also provide a level playing field for all food companies.*"

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## **Editorial notes**

[1] The Government's White Paper on Public Health is due to be published on Tuesday 16 November 2004.  
See: [www.dh.gov.uk/AboutUs/HeadsOfProfession/ChiefMedicalOfficer/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/AboutUs/HeadsOfProfession/ChiefMedicalOfficer/fs/en)

[2] Based on figures from the Government Health Survey 2002, the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF) estimates that at current trends 530,000 additional children will become overweight and 127,000 will become obese over a three year period.

[3] See: Dibb S., (1993), Children: Advertisers' Dream, Nutrition Nightmare? – The case for more responsibility in food advertising, Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance).

[4] See FSA Board paper 04/03/02, para 14: [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsa040302.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsa040302.pdf)

[5] See para. 192 of House of Commons Health Committee, *Obesity, Third Report of Session 2003-04*, Volume 1, published 27 May 2004: [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhealth.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhealth.htm)

[6] See Chief Medical Officer's, *Annual Health Check Report 2002*, Obesity: Action Recommended:  
[www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk)

[7] For instance:

A BBC survey of 9,000 people, published in March 2004, 81% strongly supported a ban on fast food and sweet adverts on television when children are watching. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3561483.stm>

A BBC / ICM poll of 1,010 people in September 2004, 76% thought that the Government should ban junk food ads on children's TV. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3638714.stm>

[8] For a current list of the 122 national organisations supporting the Children's Food Bill which will introduce legislation to protect children from unhealthy food marketing, see: [www.sustainweb.org/child\\_sup.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/child_sup.asp)

[9] Restrictions on the promotion of unhealthy foods to children need to take account of all forms of junk food marketing, not just television advertising. Experience from tobacco advertising demonstrates that following a ban, industry channels funding into other forms of marketing.

[10] The Children's Food Bill was presented to Parliament with cross-party support by Debra Shipley MP on 18 May 2004. For more information about the Children's Food Bill or to download a copy of the Bill, visit: [www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodbill](http://www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodbill) or [www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk)

241 cross-party MPs have already signed the Children's Food Bill Early Day Motion, EDM 1256. To read the EDM 1256 or to see the full list of signatories, visit: <http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motion.html/ref=1256>

[11] *Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming* advocates food and agricultural policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. Sustain represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. Membership is open to national organisations which do not distribute profits to private shareholders and which therefore operate in the public interest. See: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)