

Press release



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205 MPs increase pressure on Reid to ban junk food ads

Sustain, co-ordinators of the campaign for the Children's Food Bill have announced that 205 MPs already support legislation to end junk food marketing to children [1]. The announcement coincides with a keynote speech today by the Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP, in which the Secretary of State will set out the philosophy and political approach to the forthcoming White Paper on Public Health [2].

The Children's Food Bill was introduced to Parliament by Debra Shipley MP earlier this year and is supported by 120 national organisations, including major heart, cancer, diabetes, obesity, parents' and children's charities [3]. The Bill will introduce a range of measures 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, "*Calls from the Food Standards Agency, the House of Commons Health Committee and the Chief Medical Officer for greater social responsibility from the food industry have been ignored. Children's health is too important to leave to ineffective calls for voluntary action, so Government should include regulation of the food industry in the Public Health White Paper*". [4, 5, 6]

Debra Shipley, Labour MP for Stourbridge commented, "*The Health Secretary and the rest of the Government must take note of the overwhelming public, professional and political support for legislation to protect and improve children's diet-related health. This campaign is backed by 205 MPs and a wide range of organisations from the Royal College of Physicians to the NUT, which demonstrates the urgent need for the Government to take action*". [7]

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Editorial notes

[1] 205 MPs from ten political parties have signed the Children's Food Bill Early Day Motion, EDM 1256, see: <http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motion.html/ref=1256>. The number of signatories per party is as follows:

Conservative Party:	11 MPs	Liberal Democrats:	37 MPs
Democratic Unionist Party:	4 MPs	Plaid Cymru:	4 MPs
Independent:	1 MP	Scottish National Party:	3 MPs
Independent Conservative:	1 MP	Social Democratic and Labour Party:	1 MP
Labour Party:	140 MPs	Ulster Unionist Party:	3 MPs

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

[2] Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP, Secretary of State for Health, gives the Keynote Speech ('Policy and Priorities') at the Health Development Agency Conference 2004 at 10.10am on Thursday 23 September. See: www.hda-online.org.uk/html/resources/conferences.html

The Government White Paper on action to improve public health is expected in autumn 2004. See: www.dh.gov.uk/AboutUs/HeadsOfProfession/ChiefMedicalOfficer/fs/en

[3] For a full list of the 120 national organisations supporting the Children's Food Bill, please see: www.sustainweb.org/child_sup.asp

[4] See FSA Board paper 04/03/02, para 14: 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

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

[7] Strong public support is demonstrated by numerous independently conducted surveys.

In a BBC survey of 9,000 people, published on 24 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>

In another survey of 1,010 people, conducted on behalf of the BBC by ICM and published on 9 September 2004, 76% said that the government should ban junk food advertisements from children's television. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3638714.stm>

[8] *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