

Press release: Embargo 10.00am Wednesday 24th June, 2009

Proposed New Broadcasting Authority can protect children's health

The Irish Heart Foundation and the National Heart Alliance today (Wed June 24th) called for a ban on all TV advertising of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) up to 9pm at night to protect the health of the country's children.

Irish Heart Foundation's Health Promotion Manager, Maureen Mulvihill said such a move by the proposed new Broadcasting Authority of Ireland was vital to ensuring that young people watching programmes outside of children's viewing hours are protected from sophisticated ad campaigns that promote unhealthy eating.

"A 6am to 9pm ban would protect the health of children, address the concerns of Irish parents and respond to the robust scientific evidence that links commercial promotion of foods and beverages to poor diets in children," she declared.

"The recent review of regulations in the UK, where ads to children for foods HFSS were banned, showed that the law did not go far enough. Advertising to children was reduced, but children still saw the same amount of ads(1), because advertising during children's programmes switched to adult viewing times, when more children watch soaps and other family entertainment programmes than children's programmes(2), and there was an increase in TV channels."

David Kennedy, Chair of the National Heart Alliance, said that a recent survey commissioned by the Alliance showed that almost 4 in 5 Irish parents would agree to a ban in advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt up to the watershed of 9pm. Nine in 10 parents said that advertising influences their children's food choices.

Ms Mulvihill was speaking when the Irish Heart Foundation and the National Heart Alliance met with the Joint Committee on Communications, Energy and Natural Resources where they welcomed the signing off by the Dáil of the new Broadcasting Bill last week which is now before the Seanad.

They also highlighted the need to address all media targeted at children carrying ads for unhealthy foods - particularly the Internet which is providing increasing opportunities for advertisers. They urged that as a first step the Department of Communications and the Joint Committee on Communications should begin to monitor how much internet and SMS advertising Irish children are being exposed to. Other areas of concern include

cinemas, magazines for young people and banners and posters in facilities used mainly by children.

The call for more concerted action on advertising came after the Irish Heart Foundation invited parents to become watchdogs to protect their children against the marketing of unhealthy foods through TV adverts, social networking sites and cartoons. Together with the National Heart Alliance, the Foundation is urging parents to join the Children's Food Campaign online at www.childrensfoodcampaign.net

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References:

- (1) *Changes in the nature and balance of television food advertising to children, Ofcom, Dec 2008*
- (2) *Marketing of Unhealthy Foods to Children: How TV advertising regulations are failing children, Which, Nov 2007*

National Heart Alliance members supporting this position paper:

- ASH Ireland
- Association of Health Promotion Ireland
- Centre for Health Behaviour Research, Waterford Institute of Technology
- Centre for Sports Science & Health, Dublin City University
- Dental Health Foundation
- Dept of Nursing & Health Sciences, Athlone Institute of Technology
- Dept of Physical Education & Sports Science, University of Limerick
- Dept of Preventative Medicine, St Vincent's Hospital
- Diabetes Federation of Ireland
- European Institute of Women's Health
- Health Promoting Hospitals Network
- Joint Managerial Body of Secondary Schools
- Health Service Executive (HSE), Population Health
- Institute of Community Health Nursing
- Institute of Public Health
- Irish Cancer Society
- Irish Heart Foundation
- Irish Nurses Organisation
- Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute
- Irish Sports Council
- National Sudden Infant Death Register
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Physical Education Association of Ireland
- *safefood*
- School of Biological Science, Dublin Institute of Technology