

Regulation of High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) Foods in Ireland

April 2026 – Not to be taken as legal advice



Overview

1. Current Regulatory Framework

Ireland operates a layered, multi-code system governing the advertising and marketing of High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) food and beverage products.

The key components are as follows:

1.1 Coimisiún na Meán Broadcasting Codes

General Commercial Communications Code:

- A maximum of 25% of sold advertising time may be used for HFSS products, with no more than one in four advertisements for HFSS across the broadcast day.
- Health claims must be scientifically proven, promote a balanced diet, and must not exploit fear, promise specific weight loss, or encourage overconsumption.
- HFSS commercial communications are not permitted in or around children's programmes.

Children's Commercial Communications Code:

- HFSS advertising is not permitted in children's programmes.
- HFSS commercial communications for children must not include licensed characters, health and nutrition claims, or promotional offers.

1.2 Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Code

Section 8: Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages sets out that:

- Where HFSS marketing is permissible, it is subject to medium-specific placement rules and maximum thresholds.
- Locations primarily used by children must be free from all HFSS marketing communications.
- Marketing must not encourage children to consume a product solely to avail of a promotional offer.

1.3 Voluntary Code of Practice (VCoP) – Department of Health

Arising from the Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016–2025, the Voluntary Code of Practice (VCoP) applies to non-broadcast media including digital, out-of-home, print and cinema, as well as commercial sponsorship and retail product placement:

- Where age-filters exist, HFSS marketing may not target children under 15.

- Large roadside billboard displays of HFSS products are restricted within 100 metres of a school gate.

1.4 European Union (EU) Pledge

- A voluntary initiative by food and beverage companies to change how they advertise to children.
- Independently monitored by the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA).
- Commits signatories to no advertising to children under 12, except for products meeting approved nutrition criteria or national dietary guidelines.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS UNDER REVIEW

Several active policy processes are likely to shape the future regulatory landscape:

- England's Less Healthy Food (LHF) Advertising Regulations — being monitored as a potential model.
- ASA Code review currently under way.
- Coimisiún na Meán work programme.
- National Obesity Strategy (see timeline below).
- Safefood 'Food Environment' campaign, Appetite for Change study, and Our Kids' Exposure to Unhealthy Food report.

National Obesity Strategy — Key Timeline

From Q1 2025	Stakeholder engagement (Food and Drink Ireland (FDI) not included in initial phase)
7 August 2025	Public consultation launched
26 August 2025	Industry stakeholder focus group on strategy direction (FDI attended)
18 September 2025	Public consultation closed
2026	First draft and final document expected

POSITION ON REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

- Internal marketing codes that meet or exceed regulatory requirements are already in place, reflecting a demonstrated commitment by industry to responsible practice.
- Ireland's existing framework — spanning broadcast codes, the Voluntary Code of Practice, and the EU Pledge — already provides comprehensive, multi-layered oversight. This should be the foundation for any future policy.
- Consistency within the established framework best supports long-term compliance and avoids the regulatory uncertainty that comes with frequent structural change.
- The Nutrient Profiling Model, developed specifically for broadcast and advertising contexts and in use since its first adoption by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, has a proven track record. Replacing it risks inconsistency and imposes unnecessary burden without clear benefit.