



Our latest monitoring sweep to tackle age-restricted ads on children's websites and YouTube channels

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We've published findings from the second of our online monitoring sweeps to identify and tackle age-restricted ads appearing in children's media.

Advertisers placing age-restricted ads online are required, under the Advertising Code, to target their ads away from child audiences.

Following on from the **first report in a year-long project**, we undertook another CCTV-style watch to prioritise identifying and tackling inappropriately placed online ads for: gambling, alcohol, e-cigarettes and tobacco, slimming and weight control products and food and soft drinks classified as high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS products).

Work is underway to prevent a repeat of breaches identified in the first report, which covered the period April to June. As those breaches could not be notified to advertisers until after the monitoring data had been assessed, the ASA did not expect to see the results of that work in this report. However, encouragingly, the overall number of ads found to have broken the rules has reduced in comparison to the first sweep.

By publishing a **list of monitored websites** and engaging directly with advertisers found to have breached the rules, the ASA expects to see ongoing progress, such as advertisers of age-restricted products block listing monitored sites to further reduce breaches in the third and fourth sweeps of the project.

Over the three month period, from July to September 2020, using monitoring tools to capture age-restricted ads served on a sample of 49 websites and 7 YouTube

channels attracting a disproportionately high child audience, we:

- identified further instances where the ad rules were broken
- are taking follow-up action to contact the advertisers whose ads broke the rules to secure the removal of the problem ads; and
- warned the advertisers to review and, as necessary, amend their practices to ensure they target future ads responsibly

It is important to note that ads for a wide variety of products and services, of which age-restricted ads are likely to be a small subset, will have been served to the monitored websites and YouTube channels over the monitoring period. The report draws no conclusions about the rate of children's exposure to age-restricted ads on these monitored channels.

In summary, we found that:

- Overall, **127 age-restricted ads** broke the advertising rules
- In total, **44 advertisers** placed age-restricted ads in **27 websites and 4 YouTube channels** aimed at or attracting a disproportionately large child audience

A breakdown of each product category reveals the following number of breaches:

Gambling:

- **5 different betting ads** from 3 gambling operators appeared on **6 websites and 0 YouTube channels**

Alcohol:

- **6 different alcohol ads** from 4 brands appeared on **2 websites and 3 YouTube channels**

Weight reduction:

- **14 different weight reduction ads** from 2 advertisers appeared on **8 websites and 1 YouTube channel**

HFSS:

- **102 different HFSS ads** (with around half of products being technical breaches of the rules, which are unlikely to appeal to children e.g. cooking sauces, olive oil etc.) from 35 advertisers appeared on **27 websites and 4 YouTube channels**

No ads for e-cigarettes were picked up during this monitoring period.

Encouragingly, the number of gambling ads reduced significantly, from **70 ads in the first sweep to 5 ads in the second sweep**. Significantly, none of the gambling operators **contacted during the national lockdown** were found to have broken the rules during this latest monitoring exercise.

As many gambling operators had already been contacted before this project began and therefore had more time to ensure their ads were targeted away from children, we hope to see this trend mirrored in other sectors in the third report next year, as advertisers will, by then, have had a similar amount of time to amend their practices.

On 6 October, 2020, Google introduced a new policy for HFSS ads, which requires advertisers to self-declare their ads as HFSS and will restrict the serving of these ads to logged-in users with a declared age of 18+ only. It is anticipated that this new policy will have a positive impact on the ASA's next monitoring report.

As part of our five year strategy, *More Impact Online*, we will continue running this monitoring exercise quarterly to pick-up instances of and take action where age-restricted ads are served on child-orientated websites and YouTube channels. We will report publically on these figures and we reserve the discretion to publicise repeat offenders.

Advertising Standards Authority
Chief Executive, Guy Parker said:

"We're encouraged to see advertisers, most notably in the gambling sector, taking steps to target their age-restricted online ads responsibly. We expect that trend to continue, particularly amongst HFSS advertisers, throughout the remainder of this project and beyond. We'll continue working with advertisers and taking action where necessary to build a culture of zero tolerance for age-restricted ads appearing on websites aimed at children."

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All companies listed are registered at:
Castle House, 37-45 Paul Street,
London, EC2A 4LS [\[view on map\]](#)

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