

Press release



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Children's Food Bill EDM increases pressure on public health White Paper consultation

An Early Day Motion (EDM) in support of Sustain's Children Food Bill, tabled by Debra Shipley MP [1], already has support from 57 cross-party MPs [2]. The EDM acknowledges the strength of the Children's Food Bill in improving children's diets and future health and sends a powerful message to the Department of Health, whose public health consultation ends this week [3].

The Children's Food Bill, developed by *Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming* in response to the growing crisis in children's diet-related health [4], was presented to Parliament by Debra Shipley on Tuesday 18 May. It is currently supported by 114 national organisations [5].

The Bill will prevent childhood obesity and other food-related disorders through a range of measures, including legislation to protect children from junk food marketing and the sale of fatty, sugary and salty foods in school vending machines. It will also set strict nutrient and compositional standards for school meals and require food education and practical skills to be taught as part of the national curriculum. An additional requirement is for the government to promote healthy foods, such as fruit and vegetables, to children [6].

Charlie Powell, Project Officer at Sustain stated, "*The government should wake up and realise that in spite of all its spin, most in the food industry have no intention of acting responsibly when it comes to the promotion of junk food to children - they are more interested in the money they are making, than they are in safeguarding children's health*".

Sustain's coalition of 114 national supporting organisations will be encouraging parents and concerned individuals to write to their MPs asking them to sign the EDM.

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Editorial notes

[1] The Early Day Motion was tabled by Debra Shipley on Monday 24 May and states:

That this House notes that there is a crisis in children's diet-related health, demonstrated by alarming increases in childhood obesity and the appearance of 'adult-onset' diseases, such as type II diabetes, in schoolchildren and which the Food Standards Agency has described as a timebomb

which needs to be defused; further notes that the 2000 National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that nine in ten children consume more saturated fat and eight in ten children consume more sugar and five in ten children consume more salt than levels recommended for adults; recognises that this situation is caused by a number of factors including marketing to children of foods containing high levels of fat, sugar and salt, the poor composition of foods on sale in schools, the lack of practical cooking skills in the national curriculum and insufficient promotion to children of healthy foods; and therefore supports the Children's Food Bill in principle which will result in the implementation of a range of measures which will improve children's diets and future health.

[2] The list of MPs which have signed the Early Day Motion are available from: <http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motions.html>. Supporters include members from the following parties: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Ulster Unionist, SNP and Plaid Cymru. More MPs are expected to sign up to the motion in the coming days.

[3] The Department of Health's '*Choosing Health? A consultation on action to improve people's health*' ends on 28 May 2004. The consultation asks for views about restrictions on food advertising, promotion and availability.

[4] For example, the Chief Medical Officer has described childhood obesity as a "public health time bomb" which needs to be defused (CMO Annual Report 2002). Obesity in six year olds has doubled (to 8.5%) and trebled among 15 year olds (to 15%) over a 10 year period and *adult-onset* (Type II) diabetes is now seen in school children (Health Survey England, 2001).

[5] For a current list of supporting organisations, see: www.sustainweb.org/child_sup.asp

[6] For more information about the Children's Food Bill and for a copy of the Bill itself, visit: www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodbill

[7] *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.