

India bans condom advertisements from prime time television (Update)

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India has slapped a nationwide ban on television ads for condoms during prime time hours, citing rules prohibiting "vulgar" content and concerns over children viewing salacious material.

The information and broadcasting ministry ordered India's estimated 900 television channels to restrict condom commercials to between 10pm and 6am, threatening repercussions if the ads fall outside graveyard hours.

"All TV channels are hereby advised not to telecast the advertisements of condoms which are (a) for particular age group and could be indecent for viewing by children," the order said Monday.

It also cited broadcasting regulations prohibiting "indecent, vulgar, suggestive, repulsive or offensive themes".

India's public and private television channels beam into nearly 183 million households across the country, data from the Broadcast Audience Research Council industry group shows.

Advocates for birth control warned the blackout risked undoing decades of progress on sexual and reproductive health.

The Population Foundation of India, a Delhi-based nonprofit, said condoms were one of the few methods available for family planning and encouraged men to also take responsibility for birth control.

"What we need is a more sensitive approach without compromising on information and advocating for sexual and reproductive choice," the charity's executive director Poonam Muttreja said in a statement.

Sex remains a taboo subject in India, a broadly conservative and traditional country, and condom ads have stirred up controversy in the past.

In September, India's largest trading body successfully lobbied for condom billboards featuring a former porn star to be pulled down in Gujarat state, citing religious sensitivities.

In lodging its protest, the trade body accused the condom manufacturer of putting "India's cultural value at stake" by promoting contraceptives on the eve of a Hindu festival.

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