

TALKING ABOUT: HEALTHIER BEVERAGE ENVIRONMENTS

What surrounds us shapes our health in many ways. One of the most important influences on health is the beverage environment. We are what we drink — and what we drink is shaped by what beverages are available, sold and promoted in our communities.

Public health advocates in California and nationwide are working to change beverage environments in order to increase the availability and consumption of water and other healthy beverages, while decreasing consumption of soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages.

Why does the beverage environment matter?

New research paints a dramatic picture of the significant role that soda consumption has on health:

- In a recent research review, only one high-risk dietary practice emerged as being definitively linked to overweight in children: intake of sugar-sweetened beverages.¹
- Daily intake of sugar-sweetened beverages is estimated to increase the risk of developing diabetes by 32%.²
- Soda contributes nearly half the additional calories Americans have consumed since obesity levels first began rising in the 1970s.³
- The average American drinks nearly 50 gallons of sweetened beverages per year.⁴
- In California, 41% of children ages 2 to 11 and 62% of teens drink soda or other sugar-sweetened beverages daily.⁵
- Water is the most healthful beverage for hydration, yet schools are not required to provide it during mealtimes.⁶ In California, 40% of school districts recently reported no access to free drinking water for students during meals and many communities report not having safe drinking water.⁷

What can we do to improve beverage environments?

One of the most effective population-wide obesity prevention strategies we could enact would be to **reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by raising their price** via an excise tax. A recent USDA study found that consumers facing a higher price induced by a soda tax would react by choosing other beverages, such as diet drinks, bottled water, juice, coffee/tea, or milk.⁸ In California, a proposed tax on sugar-sweetened beverages would also **raise \$1 billion per year to promote healthy**

eating and physical activity in schools and communities.

Other important strategies to improve beverage environments locally and statewide include:

- Work to make sure all California communities have safe drinking water flowing from their taps.
- Require that all vending and concession beverages sold at city- or county-owned parks and facilities comply with healthy beverage standards.
- Make free, fresh drinking water readily available during meals in school food service areas.
- Establish nutrition standards for beverages served in childcare settings.
- Increase support for breastfeeding and pumping at worksites and public facilities.

For more information, see the California Campaign for Healthy Beverages:
http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/healthy_bev.html.

Berkeley Media Studies Group's "Talking About" series provides advocates with straightforward language on how our environment shapes our health, and what we can do to improve both. Supported in part by a grant from The California Endowment. For more information, visit www.bmsg.org.

References

¹ Woodward-Lopez, G., Ritchie, L., Kao, J., Crawford, P. Sweetened Beverages & Obesity. Webinar. Center for Weight and Health, University of California, Berkeley. May 6, 2010.

² Lambrakos, L.K., Coxson, P., Goldman, L., Bibbins-Domingo, K. Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption and the Attributable Burden to Diabetes and Coronary Heart Disease. Presentation. San Francisco. March 5, 2010.

³ Woodward-Lopez G, Kao K, Ritchie L. To what extent have sweetened beverages contributed to the obesity epidemic? UC Berkeley Dr. Robert C. and Veronica Atkins Center for Weight and Health. January 2009 – unpublished.

⁴ "Shifts in Patterns and Consumption of Beverages between 1965 and 2002." *Obesity*. 2007; 15: 2739-2747.

⁵ Babey SH, Jones M, Yu H and Goldstein H. Bubbling over: Soda consumption and its link to obesity in California. Healthy Policy Brief: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Sept 2009.

⁶ Chandran, Kumar. Improving Water Consumption in Schools: Challenges, Promising Practices, and Next Steps. California Food Policy Advocates, October 2009.

⁷ CA Project Lean. Presentation. Oakland, CA. September 14, 2009.

⁸ Smith, T.A., Biing-Hwan, L., and Jonq-Ying, L. Taxing Caloric Sweetened Beverages: Potential Effects on Beverage Consumption, Calorie Intake, and Obesity, ERR-100, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2010.