

Britain defends new sugar tax following criticism

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British finance minister George Osborne on Thursday defended his plans to introduce a new sugar tax to tackle obesity, criticised as "absurd" by the soft drinks industry.

"There are always going to be people who will oppose these kinds of things—but I think this is going to be one of those landmark public health decisions that we take as a generation," Osborne told ITV News.

The [finance minister](#) announced the surprise measure during his annual budget on Wednesday, sparking immediate condemnation from the drinks industry.

"It's disappointing that the government has chosen to single out soft drinks," said Jon Woods, general manager of Coca-Cola in Britain.

"If the aim is to reduce [obesity](#), this levy flies in the face of evidence from around the world which shows taxes do very little, if anything, to reduce sugar and calorie intake or obesity levels but do add to people's cost of living," he added.

The levy on drinks with more than five grammes of sugar per 100 millilitres will be introduced in two years as Britain battles some of the worst obesity rates in Europe.

Only a handful of countries such as France, South Africa and Mexico have attempted such a tax.

Osborne said that Britain's childhood obesity problem was "really bad news", and that it was "clearer and clearer that the biggest source of sugar intake has been [sugary drinks](#)".

However, the drinks industry said it was already taking action to combat obesity and that other food-and-drink sectors needed to help shoulder the burden.

"In 2015 we agreed a calorie reduction goal of 20 percent by 2020," said British Soft Drinks Association director general Gavin Partington.

"By contrast, sugar and [calorie intake](#) from all other major take-home food categories is increasing—which makes the targeting of [soft drinks](#) simply absurd," he added.

According to 2015 figures, Britain is one of the worst countries in Europe for childhood obesity with 28 percent of children aged between two and 15 overweight or obese.

During his budget announcement, Osborne said that an average five-year-old child consumes his own body weight in [sugar](#) each year.

"We are going to use the money to double the amount we spend on sports in schools... so that kids are getting physical activity as well," he said Thursday.

Media reports suggest the tax could add 8p (0.10 euros, \$0.11) to a can of cola.

The government hopes the tax will raise £520 million a year (661 million euros, \$732 million).

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