

Policy makers must act to reduce energy drinks consumption by children and adolescents, says new report

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UK policy makers must act against excessive energy drinks consumption by children and young people, argues a new report published by the Food Research Collaboration, an initiative of the Centre for Food Policy (City University London).

The paper, written by Dr Shelina Visram (Durham University) and Kawther Hashem (Action on Sugar, and Queen Mary University of London), reviews the worldwide evidence on [energy drinks](#) and their impact on [health](#), and suggests possible measures for local and national authorities in the UK.

As outlined in the report, one survey involving 16 European countries including the UK shows that 68 per cent of adolescents (ages 11 to 18) and 18 per cent of children (age 10 and under) consume energy drinks, with 11 per cent of adolescents and 12 per cent of children drinking at least 1 litre in a single session.

European studies quoted in the paper link energy drink consumption to health complaints such as headaches, stomach aches and sleeping problems, while emergency department visits associated with energy drink consumption in the USA doubled between 2007 and 2011.

Consumption of energy drinks is also associated with risky behaviours such as binge drinking and drug use, according to data cited in the paper.

The UK government has already announced a tax on sugary beverages as a step towards tackling childhood obesity, but energy drinks usually contain high amounts of both sugar and caffeine.

As the report points out, more research is required on how these ingredients interact with each other and with other stimulants present in energy drinks, such as taurine and guarana.

A single can of popular brands on the market can contain around 160mg of caffeine, while the European Food Safety Authority recommends an intake of no more than 105mg caffeine per day for an average 11-year-old.

The authors of the briefing paper propose legislation against the sale of energy drinks to under-16s and a ban on marketing targeted at children.

Other potential steps include in-school interventions and the implementation of shared strategies on energy drinks and children by local and health authorities.

Other facts and figures from the report:

- Sales of energy drinks in the UK increased by 155% between 2006 and 2014, from 235 to 600 million litres
- Some brands on the market can contain 20 teaspoons of sugar per 500ml can
- Energy drinks account for 13% of caffeine exposure in adolescents and 43% in children
- 53% of adolescent energy drink consumers reported co-consumption with alcohol
- Adolescents in the UK consumed 3.1 litres of energy drinks per month on average, compared to 2 litres/ per month for the other European countries surveyed in a cited EFSA study.

Dr Shelina Visram, Lecturer in public policy and health at Durham University, said:

"Youth energy drink consumption is a growing public health concern due to the high caffeine and sugar contents of these drinks. More research is needed to understand the short- and long-term effects in terms of health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. However, the available evidence indicates that these drinks are associated with a range of health complaints and risky behaviours in school-age children. Action is needed by local and national government to restrict the sale and marketing of these drinks to young people."

Kawther Hashem, Registered nutritionist and researcher at Action on Sugar based at Queen Mary University of London, said:

"Children and teenagers are being deceived into drinking large cans of energy drinks, thinking they are going to improve their performance at school, during sports, or even on a night out. In reality it is more likely increasing their risk of developing obesity, type 2 diabetes and dental caries, which will have lifelong implications on their health. The government needs to set strict limits on added sugars in these products and ban the sale to children under 16 because of their high caffeine, calorie and sugar content."

Professor Corinna Hawkes, Director of the Centre for Food Policy at City University London and Chair of the Food Research Collaboration, said:

"It's about time the British public had more information about the health effects of energy drinks. The evidence presented in this paper should make policy makers sit up and pay more attention to the rapidly rising consumption of energy drinks in the UK, especially among young people."

More information: foodresearch.org.uk/energy-drinks/

Provided by City University

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