

Sugary drink sales drop nearly 20 percent after multi-faceted campaign

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After a multi-faceted campaign that included policy changes and community education efforts, residents of one Maryland county put fewer sugary drinks in their grocery carts, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2016.

Drinks loaded with [added sugars](#) are one of the leading sources of empty calories in the diet of both children and adults, and overconsumption of sugar is associated with obesity and an increased risk of heart disease.

In 2012, the Horizon Foundation and several community partners began a multi-year [campaign](#) to encourage people to reduce consumption of sugary sodas, [sports drinks](#), [energy drinks](#), [fruit drinks](#) and flavored water/teas in Howard County, Maryland.

Comparing 2012, before the campaign, to 2015, researchers found:

- Sales of sugar-sweetened soda fell by almost 20 percent by volume in Howard County but remained stable in comparison stores;
- Sales of fruit-flavored beverages with added sugars fell about 15 percent; and
- Sales of 100 percent juice fell 15 percent.

The researchers note that this is the first study to use objective retail sales data to measure the effectiveness of a community led campaign to reduce the consumption of [sugary drinks](#).

"This study shows that a [public health campaign](#) combining community-wide education, policy changes and culture-shifting efforts can significantly reduce sugary drink sales," said Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph.D., Director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut. "Through complementary strategies from advocating for changes to child care nutrition standards to creating TV ads, "Howard County Unsweetened" made a concerted effort to encourage families to switch their drinks."

The campaign included policy measures such as:

- successfully strengthening the local school system's wellness policy to eliminate sugary drinks in student-accessible vending machines and at school-day functions;
- enacting a 2014 state law that prohibits licensed childcare centers from serving sugary drinks to children in their care;
- enacting a 2015 local law making healthier food and drink more widely available on local government property and in children's programming; and
- convincing almost 50 local community organizations through outreach and education to improve the food and drink choices they offer at meetings and through vending machines.

The campaign also educated the community through:

- social marketing (e.g., TV ads, social media, online ad buys);
- direct consumer education (e.g., using a marketing team to engage consumers at pools, community events, sporting events, health fairs); and
- healthcare professional training to improve patient counseling on the dangers of sugary drinks and the diagnosis and treatment of childhood obesity.

To determine the impact of the overall campaign, researchers compared weekly beverage sales of top-selling brands from 15 supermarkets in Howard County with a matched set of 17 supermarkets in southeastern Pennsylvania, controlling for marketing influences such as product prices.

The study did not have sales data from non-supermarket vendors, such as convenience stores, and only included the top selling brands sold rather than all brands sold.

The American Heart Association recommends that children and adult women consume no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugars a day. Adult men should have no more than 9 teaspoons. One 12-ounce can of soda has more than 8 teaspoons of added sugar.

Provided by American Heart Association

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