

Frequently Asked Questions

NYS Sugar-sweetened Beverage (SSB) Tax

SSB Tax Basics

Q. What are sugar-sweetened beverages?

A: For the proposed tax, sugar-sweetened beverages are soft drinks that contain more than 10 calories per 8 ounces. They include sweetened water, soda, sports drinks, “energy” drinks, colas, sweetened bottled coffee or tea, and sweetened fruit or vegetable drinks containing less than 70% natural fruit or vegetable juice. Milk, milk products, milk substitutes, dietary aids, and infant formula are exempt.

Q. Is maple syrup included?

A. Maple syrup would not be taxed. Honey would not be taxed. Only beverage syrups are included in the excise tax.

Q. How is the tax collected?

A. The tax is levied at the first point in the supply chain - so when the beverage syrup is first manufactured, the beverage is first bottled or when the beverage syrup or beverage is first imported in to the state from out of state. The manufacturer, bottler, or distributor is responsible for paying the tax.

Q. Are sales from Indian reservations taxable?

A. As stated above, the tax is levied at the first point in the supply chain. The manufacturer, bottler, or distributor is responsible for paying the tax.

Q: How much will the cost increase be for a 2-liter bottle of sugar-sweetened soda? How much for a 12-ounce can of sugar-sweetened soda? How much for a 12-pack of sugar-sweetened soda?

A: A 2-liter bottle of soda contains 68 ounces; the increase in the cost of a 2-liter bottle of sugar-sweetened soda would be 68 cents. The cost increase for a 12-ounce can of sugar-sweetened soda would be 12 cents. The cost increase for a 12-pack of sugar-sweetened soda would be \$1.44.

Q: How many states, in addition to New York State, have proposed taxing sugar-sweetened beverages during 2009 or 2010?

A: Twelve (12) states. Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Vermont.

Rationale for a SSB tax

Q: Why tax sugar-sweetened beverages?

A: Taxing sugar-sweetened beverages is likely to lead to a decrease in consumption, especially among population groups that are most sensitive to price, e.g., children, low income populations, and those with higher intakes of sugar-sweetened beverages. These are the same groups who are most likely to suffer negative health impacts from high sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. A decrease in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is likely to reduce calorie intake and lead to better weight status. Increasing the cost of sugar-sweetened beverages relative to the cost of healthier beverages (such as water and low-fat milk) may lead to an increase in the consumption of the healthier beverages. A similar tax on tobacco products has contributed to a significant decrease in cigarette consumption and smoking rates, particularly among children.

Q: Why tax only sugar-sweetened beverages? Other foods, like *Twinkies* and *Ding Dongs*, provide empty calories.

A: There is significant evidence linking sugar-sweetened beverage consumption with obesity and other health problems. Studies that follow people for a long time show that people who consume more sugar-sweetened beverages gain more weight. One article that reviewed many studies found that drinking sugar-sweetened beverages had the strongest link with overweight and obesity, more than any other food-related behavior. When people drink a sugar-sweetened beverage, they do not compensate (i.e., reduce their concomitant or subsequent caloric intake) for the additional calories from the drink. So the calories from the drink become “extra” calories.

Q: Will this level of tax really cause a decrease in consumption?

A: Two studies show that increasing price can decrease consumption. One completed by the U.S. Economic Research Service found that a 10% increase in the price of soda would lead to an 8% reduction in consumption among low income populations.

In a Norwegian study, increasing the price of soft drinks by 10.8% was estimated to decrease consumption by nearly 7% in the lowest consumption group, by 17% in the highest consumption group, and by an average 9.5% overall. Increasing the price by 27.3% was associated with a drop in consumption of 17% in the lowest use group, 44% in the highest use group, and an overall 24% reduction in consumption across the population.

Q: Instead of taxing people, why not educate them about the health consequences of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption?

A: Public education campaigns alone are rarely effective in changing behavior. They are most effective when combined with other public health interventions, like price increases, that provide a financial incentive for people to change their behavior. Most people know that soda is not a healthy choice. The cost of an effective public awareness campaign to discourage soda consumption would be quite expensive. The tax creates an environment that encourages people to make healthier choices, in the same way that the tobacco tax discourages people from smoking.

Q: Shouldn't all sodas be taxed, diet and non-diet? Diet sodas are not good for people, either. Won't the tax encourage people to drink diet soda?

A: While drinking diet soda is not recommended, the evidence linking its consumption with poor health outcomes, especially obesity, is weaker than the evidence for sugar-sweetened sodas. Since the tax is designed to reduce obesity, the evidence around diet sodas and obesity would need to be stronger for their inclusion. The most healthful drinks are water and low-fat or fat-free milk. With increased public awareness surrounding the tax, we expect people to switch from drinking all types of soda (diet and non-diet) to healthier beverages like water and low-fat milk.

Q: Why isn't juice taxed?

A: There are several reasons why juice is not considered in the same category as sugar-sweetened beverages. First, the link between excess fruit juice consumption and obesity is not as consistent as with sugar-sweetened beverages. Second, 100% juice has no added sugar and provides many of the same nutritional benefits as the fruit from which it is derived, such as vitamin C, folate, and potassium. Third, while the consumption of fruit juice has increased over the past two decades, the increase is not as marked as the increase in soda consumption, which has nearly doubled. Last, although the majority of fruit servings should come from whole fruit to ensure adequate fiber intake, one serving of 100% fruit juice per day can be part of a healthy diet. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and federal nutrition programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), recommend that a variety of fruits and vegetables should be consumed each day, of which one serving per day (4 to 6 fluid ounces) can be 100% fruit or vegetable juice.

SSB Consumption

Q: How many calories should the average person consume per day?

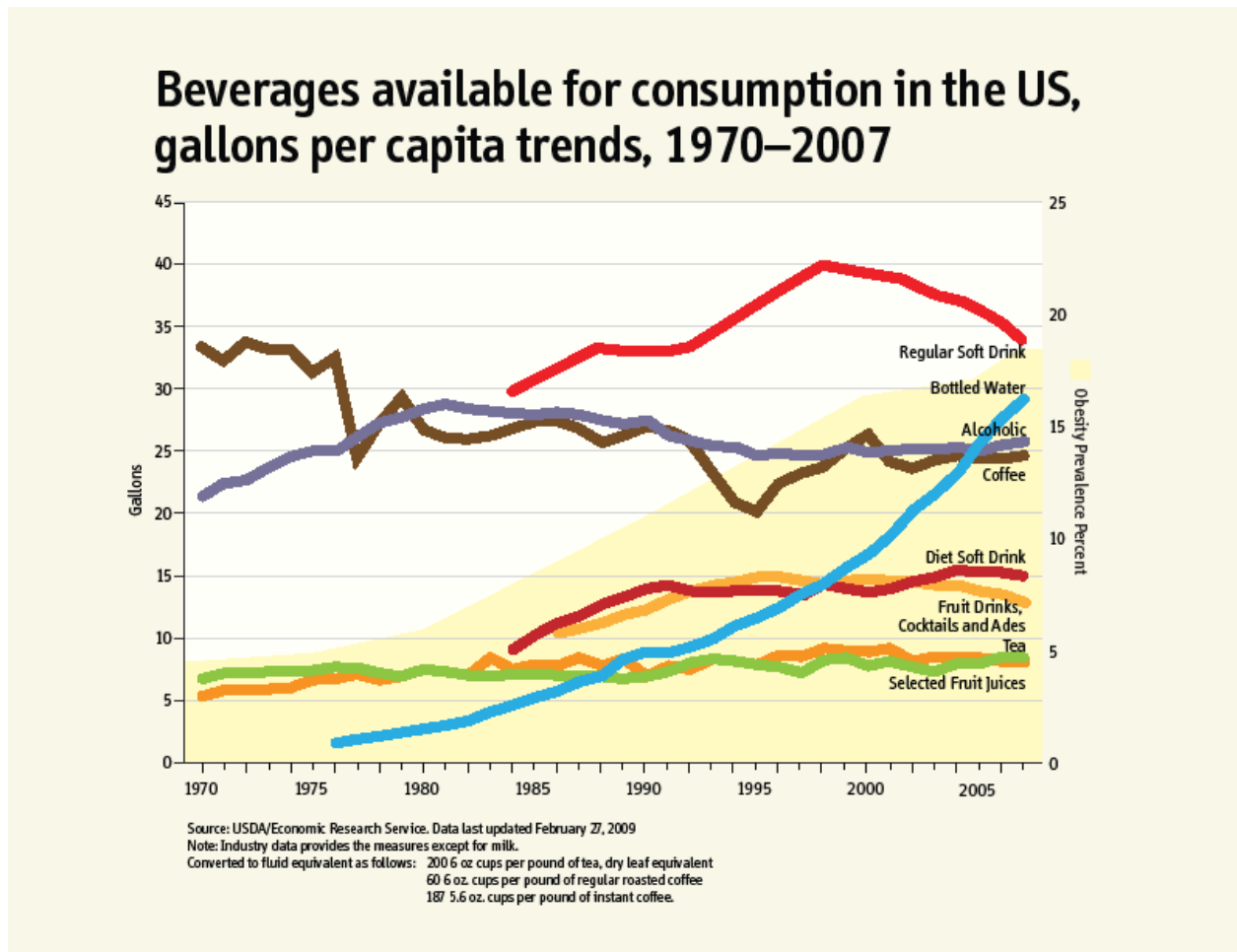
A: The average recommended daily calorie intake is 2000 calories per day.

Q: How many calories per day do people typically consume from SSB?

A: For adults 20 years and older, the average daily per capita caloric consumption of SSB was 203 calories/day. For the 64% of adults who consumed SSB on the surveyed day, SSBs contributed 294 calories/day. (Bleich, et al, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 2009).

For the 80% of children (aged 2-19 years) who consumed a SSB on the surveyed day, SSBs contributed 278 calories/day; among adolescents (12-19 years of age) SSB contributed 16% of calories/day and among younger children (2-11 years of age) SSB contributed 11% of calories/day. (Wang, et al, *Pediatrics*, 2008)

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation reports that about 15 percent of an average teenager's calories come from SSBs. (<http://www.healthiergeneration.org>)



Q: What would be the estimated weight loss based on a 10-15% predicted reduction in average SSB consumption following a SSB tax of 1 cent per ounce?

A: Average caloric intake would be reduced 20-30 calories per day which translates into an average weight loss of 2-3 pounds per year. The tax, however, is expected to have the greatest impact on consumers and youth who consume the most SSBs; they would be expected to reduce their intakes even more and thus accrue greater benefits.

Q: Will reducing SSB consumption really reduce weight?

A. Several studies have demonstrated that reductions in SSBs result in reduced caloric consumption and weight loss. These findings are most evident among those who are overweight or obese.

a. The PREMIER study in adults with pre-hypertension and stage 1 hypertension found that reducing SSB intake from an average of 310 calories/day to 228 calories/day was associated with weight loss at 18 months (1.4 pounds per SSB serving/day). In addition, reducing liquid calories (from SSBs) had a stronger impact on weight loss than a similar reduction in calories from solid foods. (Chen, et al, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 2009)

b. A comparable randomized controlled study in adolescents found that among those who were overweight those randomized to replace SSBs with non-caloric beverages had a significant decrease in body mass index (BMI) compared to the control group. (Ebbeling, et al., *Pediatrics*, 2006)

Cost to Consumers

Q: How much will the sugar-sweetened beverage tax cost the average New Yorker?

A: Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by U.S. adults was about 46 gallons per year per person in 1999-2004. If a person did not change his/her consumption, it's possible that he/she would spend an additional \$59 per year on sugar-sweetened beverages. If one reduced his/her consumption by 10% (as predicted) in response to an increase of one cent per ounce, the cost of the tax would be significantly offset by the savings from purchasing fewer sugar-sweetened beverages. In this case, the net cost impact would be an additional \$18 per year. However, if an adult replaced half of his/her average 46 gallons/year intake of sugar-sweetened beverages (-23 gallons) with equal amounts of tap water (+11.5 gallons) and low-fat milk (+11.5 gallons), he/she would save about \$100 per year.

Q: Do all New Yorkers consume 46 gallons per year of sugar-sweetened beverages?

A: No. This is an average for U.S. adults. Some people do not consume any soft drinks; others consume more than 46 gallons per year. Those who consume the greatest amounts, usually reduce their consumption the most in response to a price increase, and thus save the most money and improve their health the most as a consequence.

Q: Won't the sugar-sweetened beverage tax hurt the poor disproportionately?

A: Sugar-sweetened beverages are a discretionary beverage; they are not needed at all. Soft drinks provide no needed nutrients; they simply add calories to the diet. While surveys in New York State, and in NYC show that people with lower incomes and lower educational attainments drink more soft drinks than those with higher incomes and more education, all New Yorkers would save money by making a switch from drinking sugar-sweetened beverages to drinking healthier beverages, such as low-fat milk and tap water.

Q: Won't the tax increase families' food costs greatly?

A: It would only increase food costs if families continue to buy similar amounts of sugar-sweetened beverages as they did before the tax. If adults continue to consume the average amount of sugar-sweetened beverages, 46 gallons per year, the added cost from the tax would be \$59 per year per person. If they decrease their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by 10%, the cost of the tax would be significantly offset by the savings from purchasing fewer sugar-sweetened beverages. In this case, the net cost impact would be an additional \$18 per year per person. If an adult replaced half of his/her yearly intake of sugar-sweetened beverages with tap water and low-fat milk (in equal amounts, i.e., 11.5 gallons per year of each), he/she would save about \$100 per year and greatly improve his/her nutrition.

SSBs and Obesity

Q: Don't SSBs contribute too little to the diet to be meaningful to address for obesity reduction?

A: A review of the evidence related to 28 dietary factors thought to be associated with obesity in children, found that intake of SSBs was the only dietary practice that was consistently linked to overweight in children. (Crawford, et al. *A J Am Diet Assoc*, 2008)

A meta-analysis of 88 studies found that SSB intake was associated with increased calorie intake and body weight. (Vartanian, et al, *Am J Public Health*, 2007)

Q: If people drink fewer SSBs, won't they just consume more calories in other foods?

A: Studies show that the body deals with calories from liquids differently than calories from solids. When people drink a SSB, they don't compensate (i.e., reduce calories consumed from other food sources at the same or subsequent meal) as much as when they consume calories from solid foods. Thus, SSBs tend to provide extra calories in the diet. For example, subjects who ate 450 calories per day for 4 weeks from jelly beans (a solid carbohydrate), reduced their caloric intake from other foods by about the same number of calories and their body mass index (BMI) did not change. When the same subjects drank 450 calories per day for 4 weeks of a sugar-sweetened soda, they did not reduce their daily calorie intake from other foods. Consequently, they consumed an additional 450 calories per day and their weight and BMI increased. (DiMaggio and Mattes. *Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord*, 2000)

Q: With reports indicating that obesity rates are starting to level off in children, why is there concern about continuing to address it?

A: Obesity rates in children and adolescents are 3 to 4 times higher than they were 30-40 years ago. While the increase in weight has slowed, the rates are still very high. Among elementary school students in NYS, 38-43 percent are overweight or obese; 20-24 percent are obese while an additional 18-19 percent are overweight. Among low-income children, aged 2-5 years, 32 percent are overweight or obesity; 15 percent are obese and another 17 percent are overweight.

Among adults, obesity rates continue to be high. Currently 25 percent of New York adults are obese and another 35% are overweight. Adults who are overweight or obese still need help to lose weight and/or avoid gaining excess weight. The Healthy People 2010 goal for obesity rates in adults is less than 15%, and for obesity rates in children, the goal is less than 5%.

Q: Isn't lack of exercise the real problem in obesity?

A: In terms of weight maintenance, it's much easier not to consume extra calories than to burn them off. For example, an average adult would need to walk 27 minutes (or almost two miles) at a moderate pace to burn the calories contained in one 12-ounce can of soda (150 calories). And this is in addition to the recommended 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity to decrease risk for chronic disease. It would take 46 minutes of walking to burn off a 20 ounce soda (250 calories). The majority of adults do not meet the recommended 150 minute per week guideline, so it's unlikely they'll find time to walk the additional minutes to cover soda consumption. A 75 pound child (average 10-year-old child) would need to bicycle vigorously for about 30 minutes to burn off a 12 ounce can of soda. The most effective way to reduce weight and maintain a healthy weight is pay attention to both diet and physical activity – eat less and move more.

Q: How much does New York spend each year on medical care for obesity-related conditions?

A: According to a report by New York State Comptroller DiNapoli, New York ranks second among U.S. states in adult obesity-related medical expenditures, with total spending estimated at nearly \$7.6 billion; 81%, of which, is paid by Medicaid and Medicare, far exceeding the national average of 52%.

Beverages Industry Response

Q: How much has the beverage industry's lobbying increased since a soda tax was first suggested at the end of 2008?

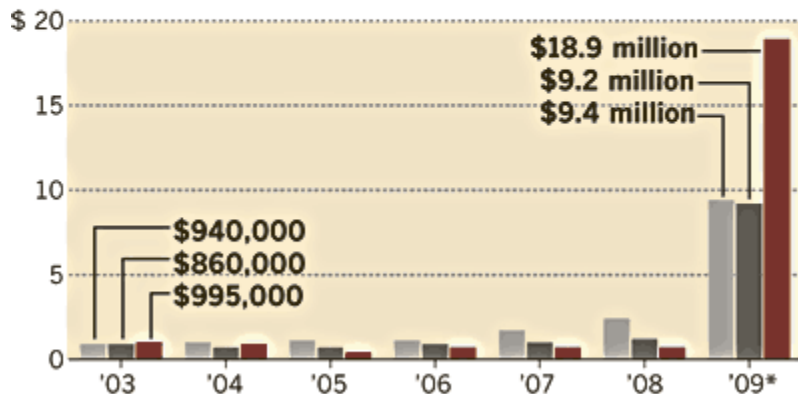
A: There has been a 13-fold (1300 %) increase in dollars spent by the beverage industry in lobbying, and increase from \$2.8 million in 2003 to \$37.5 million in 2009 (by Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and the American Beverage Association).

Beverage industry lobbying

As advocates pressed for a federal tax on sugared soft drinks last year, the beverage industry launched an intense lobbying effort against it. Annual amounts spent on lobbying by three major players:

■ Coca-Cola ■ PepsiCo ■ American Beverage Assn.

(Scale in millions)



*2009 data from Los Angeles Times/Tribune research

Source: Center for Responsive Politics. Graphics reporting by **KIM GEIGER**

Los Angeles Times

Q: Isn't the beverage industry opposed to the tax?

A: The beverage industry strives to maximize profits by selling as many sugar-sweetened beverages as possible. They want people to believe that sugar-sweetened beverages do not contribute to obesity or any other health problems. They are expected to be against anything that might decrease consumption and, therefore, their sales' revenue.

Q: Won't this tax hurt businesses that sell sugar-sweetened beverages by decreasing revenue?

A: It's likely that some people who would have bought sugar-sweetened beverages will buy a different beverage, for example bottled water, unsweetened flavored seltzer, unsweetened tea or low-fat milk. However, if some people choose to drink tap water instead of a bottled sweetened beverage, some businesses may see a decrease in revenue.

Q: Haven't beverage companies taken some steps to help children have healthier drinks in schools?

A: Beverage manufacturers (PepsiCo, Coca-Cola Beverages, Dr. Pepper-Dr. Snapple Group Beverages, Barranco Beverage, Inc., 4U2U Brands, LLC, and Campbell Soup Company) have partnered with the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association to support the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. They have voluntarily removed full-calorie SSBs from schools in recognition of the important role that full-calorie beverages can play in contributing to childhood obesity. This initiative has changed the mix of products available in vending machines in schools -- increasing healthier options, reducing the amount of sugar that youth consume during the school day and providing lower calorie and more nutritious beverage options for children in schools. According to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, as a result of this initiative, the number of calories consumed from vended beverages in schools has decreased by 58 percent from 2004 to 2008. There have been no reports of vending contractors pulling vending machines from schools indicating that vendors have made these changes while remaining profitable.

Q: Aren't people opposed to a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages?

A: A majority of New York adults support a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. In a poll conducted by the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York in December of 2008, 72% of the people polled supported a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages if the revenue raised was to be used to address childhood obesity and to reduce the need to cut services and raise other taxes. However, if the funds were not going to be dedicated to health issues, then only 52% of those polled supported the tax.

Q: If people do decrease sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, won't that hurt beverage companies, possibly causing lay-offs?

A: The proposed tax is expected to lead to a 10-15% reduction in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption; this would not be sufficient to cause significantly decreased production and lay-offs. Some people will replace sugar-sweetened beverages with alternative beverages, many of which are produced by the same beverage companies. Thus, there may be an increase in demand for healthier beverages, such as water, non-caloric flavored seltzers, and unsweetened ice tea, which would partially compensate for the reduced demand for sugar-sweetened beverages. Beverage companies already manufacture, distribute and market many lower calorie beverages, and thus are well positioned to take advantage of and meet this shift in consumer preferences.

Q: Isn't this just a way to increase revenue for the state?

A: While revenue would be generated by the sugar-sweetened beverage tax and used for health related initiatives, the measure is designed to do both--decrease consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, just as the cigarette tax is levied to decrease tobacco use -- and improve health, as well as provide needed revenue. Revenue generated from this tax will go to the New York State Health Care Reform Act (HCRA) Resources Fund to be used for health care and health related initiatives.

Sugar Sweetened Beverage Tax

Samples of News Articles and Letters to the Editor

March 3, 2010

Thursday, March 04, 2010

A tax that invests in our health

By **RICHARD F. DAINES**

First published in print: Thursday, March 4, 2010

Sixty percent of New York adults are overweight or obese, and so are one-third of our children. Many factors contribute to obesity, but there's one pernicious one: added sugar.

We consume about 300 calories more a day now than we did 30 years ago, and most of those extra calories come from sugar-sweetened sodas, energy drinks or fruit-flavored drinks. As a physician, I've had to tell patients they have diabetes, with a lifelong struggle against its complications and costs. I've walked across 149th Street in the Bronx and seen billboard after billboard advertising the huge servings and low prices of the sugary sodas sold in the fast food restaurants on each corner.

I've also been a Scoutmaster, watching a kid chugging a sports drink to make him "strong," while instead it pours so much sugar into his system that he'd have to hike at least an hour a day to burn off the calories.

Now I'm the state health commissioner, and every New Yorker is my patient. And I say, "Enough!"

Like many health professionals, I support Gov. David Paterson's proposed tax on sugar-sweetened beverages as part of a strategy to fight obesity. The financial deck has been stacked against good health for too long.

Low soft drink prices reflect government-supported subsidies on corn syrup and sugar, and hide the costs of the obesity they cause. Research published in the New England Journal of Medicine demonstrated that over the past 30 years, the cost of soft drinks has risen at only three-quarters of the rate of inflation, while the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables has risen at more than 1.5 times that of the Consumer Price Index.

These are signs of a failing market. Healthy choices are rising in price while the cost of bad choices falls. Low-fat milk costs more than soda. So grocery stores in poorer neighborhoods stock less milk and more soda, and the relentless advertising from the beverage industry and fast food joints makes sweet drinks an expected part of daily living.

The true cost of these subsidized sugar drinks is paid by taxpayers. About \$7.6 billion is spent in New York annually to treat obesity-related illnesses. Most of it is paid by taxpayers, through Medicaid and Medicare. You don't see that cost at a vending machine, at a high school basketball game or at the corner store. But we all pay for it, whether we buy soda or we don't. Government steps in to serve the public when private markets fail. That's why taxes are levied to pay for fire protection and safe highways, and why we've used taxes to decrease cigarette use. If there were profit in the right public health policies, big business would be there. In food,

there's no profit in persuading Americans to drink less of something that is cheap, heavily marketed and tastes really good.

The public costs of obesity have made it not just a personal issue, but a major public problem that will continue to absorb our taxes while it chips away at our health. Another study in The New England Journal of Medicine followed thousands of children through adulthood. It discovered that the heaviest youngsters were more than twice as likely as the thinnest to die before age 55.

Twice the rate of death by 55? Hardly the happy, refreshing world depicted in sugary beverage ads.

Recent polls of New Yorkers and of New York City voters showed that they will support a penny per ounce tax on non-diet soft drinks if the money is used to close budget deficits or support health care.

The state doesn't have the money for a lot of things this year. But we can take this major step to resist the special interests, to protect our children and to show that New York can implement an innovative public policy to offer a healthier future for us all.

Dr. Richard F. Daines in the state health commissioner.

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February 12, 2010

Soda: A Sin We Sip Instead of Smoke?

By [MARK BITTMAN](#)

Is soda the new tobacco?

In their critics' eyes, producers of sugar-sweetened drinks are acting a lot like the tobacco industry of old: marketing heavily to children, claiming their products are healthy or at worst benign, and lobbying to prevent change. The industry says there are critical differences: in moderate quantities soda isn't harmful, nor is it addictive.

The problem is that at roughly 50 gallons per person per year, our consumption of soda, not to mention other sugar-sweetened beverages, is far from moderate, and appears to be an important factor in the rise in childhood [obesity](#). This increase is at least partly responsible for a rise in what can no longer be called "adult onset" [diabetes](#) — because more and more children are now developing it.

Attention is being paid: Last week, the Obama administration announced a plan to ban candy and sweetened beverages from schools. A campaign against childhood obesity will be led by the first lady, [Michelle Obama](#). And a growing number of public health advocates are pushing for even more aggressive actions, urging that soda be treated like tobacco: with taxes, warning labels and a massive public health marketing campaign, all to discourage consumption.

A tax on soda was one option considered to help pay for [health care reform](#) (the Joint Committee on Taxation calculated that a 3-cent tax on each 12-ounce sugared soda would raise \$51.6 billion over a decade), and [President Obama](#) told *Men's Health* magazine last fall that such a tax is "an idea that we should be exploring. There's no doubt that our kids drink way too much soda."

But with all the junk food and U.F.O.'s (unidentifiable food-like objects) out there, why soda? Why a tax? And, most important, would it work?

To the beverage industry, the idea is not worth considering. Susan Neely, the president of the American Beverage Association, acknowledges that obesity is a problem but says: "If you're trying to manage people being overweight you need a variety of behavior changes to achieve energy balance — it can't be done by eliminating one food from the [diet](#)."

Even if soda consumption were to drop, say critics of the tax, a drop in childhood obesity isn't guaranteed. "Simply pricing one product higher," says Derek Yach, a senior vice president of global health policy at PepsiCo, the big food company that has spoken the most seriously about building a healthier portfolio, "would lead to unknown effects on total dietary consumption. It may even lead to worse situations: people may stop spending on

one food and eat more of another, so taxing high levels of sugar may lead to eating higher levels of fat.”

Still, the idea of a special tax on soda, similar to those on tobacco, gasoline and alcoholic beverages, is attracting more interest. Advocates of a tax note that sugared beverages are the No. 1 source of **calories** in the American diet, representing 7 percent of the average person’s caloric intake, according to government surveys, and up to 10 percent for children and teenagers. These calories, they point out, are worse than useless — they’re empty, and contribute to a daily total that is already too high.

“What you want,” says Kelly Brownell, director of Yale’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, “is to reverse the fact that healthy food is too expensive and unhealthy food is too cheap, and the soda tax is a start. Unless food marketing changes, it’s hard to believe that anything else can work.”

Advocates argue that a soda tax would reduce consumption and pay for anti-obesity campaigns. In an opinion piece in *The New England Journal of Medicine* last year, Dr. Brownell and **Thomas R. Frieden**, the director of the C.D.C. and former New York City health commissioner, estimated that in New York State alone a penny-per-ounce soda tax would raise \$1.2 billion annually.

Small excise taxes on soda are already in place in Arkansas, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia, and Chicago imposes a 3 percent retail tax on soft drinks. Soda taxes were proposed in at least 12 other states in 2009, though none were approved. Mississippi is considering legislation that would tax the syrup used to sweeten soda; the mayor of Philadelphia is weighing a tax on soda and other sugar-sweetened drinks, and Gov. **David Paterson** of New York has indicated that he will recommend a penny-per-ounce tax on sugared beverages in his 2011 budget.

The penny-per-ounce tax, favored by Dr. Brownell and others, would produce a significant increase in retail costs: the 12-pack of Coke on sale for \$2.99 would go for \$4.43 and a 75-cent can would rise to 87 cents. These increases, Dr. Brownell estimates, would reduce the annual per capita consumption of soda by more than 11 gallons, to 38.5 gallons. “And the revenue,” he says, “could be used to subsidize fruits and vegetables, fund obesity prevention programs for children and home economic classes in schools, and more.”

The model, clearly, is tobacco. Dr. Frieden, who promoted a soda tax when he was a health commissioner, sees further parallels between soda and tobacco: “There are aspects of the food industry that are reminiscent of tobacco — the sowing of doubt where there’s no reasonable doubt, funding of front groups, use of so-called experts, claims that new products which are safer for consumers are available, and the claim that they are not marketing to children.”

The public war against tobacco has worked, if imperfectly: Americans smoke at half the rate they once did, half of all smokers have quit, and the tobacco companies finance strong antismoking campaigns.

In the case of tobacco, the health risks of **smoking** were clear. But the beverage industry contends that science does not back up the assertion that childhood obesity is even partly caused by soda consumption, and has sought to make the discussion about personal choice and freedom. “Soda has calories, and food with calories causes people to put on weight when consumed in excess,” says J. Justin Wilson a self-described “libertarian consumer advocate” and senior research analyst for the Center for Consumer Freedom, an industry-sponsored advocacy

group. “But there is no unique link between soda and obesity.”

Besides, says Ms. Neely, the industry is taking measures: “The beverage industry supports real solutions to obesity and continues to step up to do its part. We’ve removed full-calorie soft drinks from schools across the country and, in support of Mrs. Obama’s initiative, will place the full calories for our products on the front of our containers.”

Perhaps the process of reducing the drinking of sweetened beverages need not be so contentious. “There are parts of the industry that want to be constructive” says Dr. Frieden. “Big Food doesn’t have to become the next tobacco.”

With this Dr. Yach agrees, and though he clearly thinks a soda tax won’t work, he’d like to see a greater government role. “The overall governmental voice and investment in solutions required has been stunningly weak. They need to forcibly say, ‘The fundamental issue is one of calorie balance, and here’s what you need to do.’ ”

The problem, says Dr. Frieden, is that, “Obesity is a major health problem that’s getting worse, and it’s clear that exhorting individuals to eat less and exercise more is not going to turn things around.”

It may be time to try something a little more forceful.

Mark Bittman writes the Minimalist column for the The Times and is the author, most recently, of “Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating.”

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Newsday Letters to the Editor
February 14, 2010

Soda tax promotes healthy choices

New Yorkers Against Unfair Taxes have gotten a lot of attention for opposing Gov. David A. Paterson's proposal to tax sugar-sweetened beverages at a penny an ounce, and dedicate the funding to health care. This "coalition of citizens and business groups" is supported by the beverage industry. They claim the tax would dig into your pocket. Well, adult obesity costs \$7.6 billion a year in health care, with most of that funded by taxes.

A six-pack of soda has about 60 teaspoons of sugar. No calcium, no protein. The tax would raise the price for a six-pack by 72 cents. Don't want to pay the tax? Buy skim milk, and tell the kids to drink tap water as well.

Some claim a soda tax is regressive. What's really regressive are economic policies that have made fruits and vegetables more expensive over time, while sugar and corn syrup in sweet drinks have become cheaper.

In New York, 60 percent of adults and 35 percent of children are obese or overweight. Children can't see that a couple hundred extra calories a day from sugary soda can turn them into chubby teens and then obese adults. That's unfair.

The proposed tax won't affect diet drinks, milk or pure fruit or vegetable juices. Instead, it's an incentive for people to make a healthier choice. Now that's fair.

Dr. Richard F. Daines

Albany

Editor's note: The writer is New York State Commissioner of Health.

The New York Times

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

LETTER; Benefits of a Soda Tax

Published: January 30, 2010

To the Editor:

Re "The Bottom Line: Why Paterson's Anti-Obesity Soda Tax Might Drive Some to Drink" (news article, Jan. 23):

What the beverage industry-financed New Yorkers Against Unfair Taxes fails to explain is that we're already paying a high price because of overconsumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Our health is suffering in great part because Americans consume 46 gallons a year of sugary soft drinks per person, which is equivalent to 40 pounds of sugar yearly.

Numerous studies have found that increased intake of sweetened beverages is associated with increased weight gain and obesity. Twenty-five percent of New York's children are obese, and 60 percent of adults are either overweight or obese.

Additionally, the state is saddled yearly with \$7.6 billion in obesity-related medical expenditures, meaning that taxpayers foot the bill to the tune of \$771 per New York household. Since sugar-sweetened beverages are the food item most strongly linked with higher rates of obesity and diabetes, it makes sense to tax this product to reduce consumption, improve the health of New Yorkers and ultimately lower the state's and the taxpayers' medical expenditures.

On top of that, we'll raise \$1 billion a year in revenue that will help New York avoid additional health care cuts.

Because Big Beverage spends hundreds of millions yearly to market sugary beverages, consumption will continue to rise unless we take action. The proposed tax is a small price to pay when it comes to saving lives and keeping state finances solvent.

Nancy Huehnergath

Millwood, N.Y., Jan. 27, 2010

The writer is director of the New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance.

Keep taxing, for kids' sake

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The New York State Public Health Association applauds Gov. David Paterson's proposal to increase taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and cigarettes.

The resulting price increase will reduce soft drink consumption and smoking, especially among children, while raising revenue that will be used to reduce cuts to health care and support prevention efforts.

In reality, the taxes are a healthy kid's initiative. Soda and other sugar-laden drinks have no nutritional value yet have been aggressively marketed directly to vulnerable children. Sugar-sweetened beverages supply 10 percent to 15 percent of total daily calories for both children and adults, according to an April 2009 New England Journal of Medicine article. With that article reporting each additional 12-ounce soft drink consumed per day increases the odds of a child becoming obese by 60 percent, New York's children are paying the price -- 25 percent are now classified as obese, according to the state comptroller's report.

Soft drink and tobacco companies reap the profits while New Yorkers and our cash-strapped health care system get stuck with the bill -- \$16 billion in obesity and tobacco-related expenditures yearly, according to the state comptroller and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

A tax on sugar-sweetened beverages and cigarettes is a triple win: for our children's health, for state revenue and for the majority of the public who support these taxes that protect children.

MICHAEL SESERMAN
Policy chairman, NYS
Public Health Association
Albany

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<http://www.timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=898999&category=opinion>

The Daily Gazette - February 21, 2010

Letter to the Editor:

Cigarette, soda tax plan would cure a lot of ills

As you are aware, we are in tough economic times. The state is in a fiscal crisis that has caused the government to cut essential programs and services that provide a better life for the children and communities of New York state. The proposed dollar increase on cigarettes and the "sugar-sweetened beverage" tax would put some dollars back into the state, which means more money to use on services that have been reduced or completely cut [Jan. 20 Gazette].

These measures would protect children and adults from the ravages of secondhand smoke and obesity by making it more expensive for the youth to start smoking and to drink sugary drinks. This, in turn, would prevent future health issues.

These taxes would not only increase the overall health of New York's children and adults, they would bring in an additional \$200 million in new annual revenue with the cigarette tax alone. The sugar-sweetened beverage tax would bring in \$450 million in 2010-2011 and \$1 billion in 2011-2012. This additional income would make it possible to provide much-needed services to the residents of New York and lower the number of people suffering from tobacco-related illnesses and obesity, which cause unnecessary loss of life and cost the state billions of dollars. Tobacco-related illness treatment costs \$822 per New York state household in federal and state taxes, and obesity-related issues cost \$771 annually.

The citizens of New York are supportive of the tax increase. Fifty-nine percent approve the additional dollar tax, and 77 percent approve if the revenue earned goes to helping people quit. Fifty-two percent of adults support a tax on soft drinks, and 72 percent would support it if the money went to programs to prevent obesity in the state.

The tax increases are a win, win, win situation for New York. They would improve overall health for adults and children, bring higher revenue for the state, and the public is in support of them.

Justin Hladik

Johnstown



NEW YORK

NYers Flip Flop on Soda Fat Tax: Poll
The word "budget" makes all the difference
Updated 11:00 AM EST, Thu, Feb 18, 2010



Getty Images

New York voters overwhelmingly back a proposal to tax sugary soda as a means to balance the budget, [according to a new poll](#). Their support marks a stark change of heart from just two weeks ago, when most voters rejected the planned tax.

What explains the sudden turnaround? The key word is "budget."

In a Feb. 4 [Quinnipiac University](#) survey, city voters opposed the "fat tax" 50 percent to 47 percent. But the question posed by pollsters omitted any mention of budget implications. In the poll released today, surveyors specifically asked voters whether they'd support the tax to balance the budget.

Voters overwhelmingly said "yes" (76 percent to 22 percent). Even traditionally tax-averse Republican voters backed the measure 60 percent to 36 percent. And the widespread support was common across ethnicities and in every borough.

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Voters also agree that the Bloomberg administration's move to curb salt usage in restaurants is a positive one. Despite some concerns that the government should keep its fingers out of the public kitchen, most respondents consider its involvement in food issues to be useful rather than meddling, the poll found.

"There's been some grumbling about 'nanny government' by [Mayor Michael Bloomberg](#), but voters are eating it up. Only a few think Mayor Mike is meddling. It's important, we agree overwhelmingly," said [Maurice Carroll](#), director of the [Quinnipiac University Polling Institute](#). "Making restaurants post calories? Combating salt in diets? We're with you, Mayor."

The poll addressed a variety of other issues important to voters, including the 9/11 terror trials and the job being done by the [NYPD](#). Quinnipiac surveyed 1,195 registered voters in the city from Feb. 11-15, with a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points.

Inserted from <<http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local-beat/NYers-Flip-Flop-on-Soda-Fat-Tax-Poll-84697727.html>>