

From 2013 to 2018, beverage companies substantially increased sugary drink advertising. They spent more than \$1 billion in 2018 to promote primarily regular soda, sports drinks, energy drinks, and iced tea – a 26% increase versus 2013. Furthermore, some brands continued to disproportionately target TV ads to teens and Hispanic and Black youth. These increases occurred at the same time major beverage companies pledged to reduce beverage calories and increase marketing of lower-calorie drinks.

In Children's Drink FACTS,¹ the 2019 Rudd Center report that documented sales and marketing of children's drinks (i.e., drinks that companies marketed as intended for children to consume), we identified some positive developments in advertising of children's drinks. For example, total advertising spending for sweetened children's drinks (fruit drinks and flavored water) declined by 83% from 2010 to 2018, and exposure to TV advertising by preschoolers and children declined by more than 50%. Just one company and two brands (Kraft Heinz: Kool-Aid and Capri Sun) were responsible for more than one-half of TV ads viewed for sweetened children's drinks.

In contrast, this analysis of advertising for sugary drink categories that are primarily marketed to teens and adults (regular soda, sports drinks, energy drinks, iced tea, fruit drinks, and flavored water) found no evidence that beverage companies have improved the nutrition content of advertised drinks or reduced sugary drink advertising in response to public health concerns about the harm caused by sugary drink consumption.

What is the nutrition content of advertised sugary drinks?

A total of 48 brands (89 sub-brands) of sugary drinks and energy drinks from 24 different companies each spent at least \$100,000 in total advertising in 2018. They included 18 regular soda, 11 energy drink, eight iced tea, six fruit drink, four sports drink, and one flavored water brand.

The nutrition content of advertised sugary drinks continues to raise concerns. The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that children and teens consume no more than 25 grams of added sugar daily and limit sugary drinks to 8 ounces per week.² However, the median sugar content in a single-serve container of energy drinks, regular soda, flavored water, and iced tea all exceeded 25 grams, while median sugar content for the other two sugary drink categories – fruit drinks and sports drinks – approached the recommended maximum daily amount of sugar (23 g and 21 g, respectively) (see **Figure 16**). Furthermore, single-serve products in all

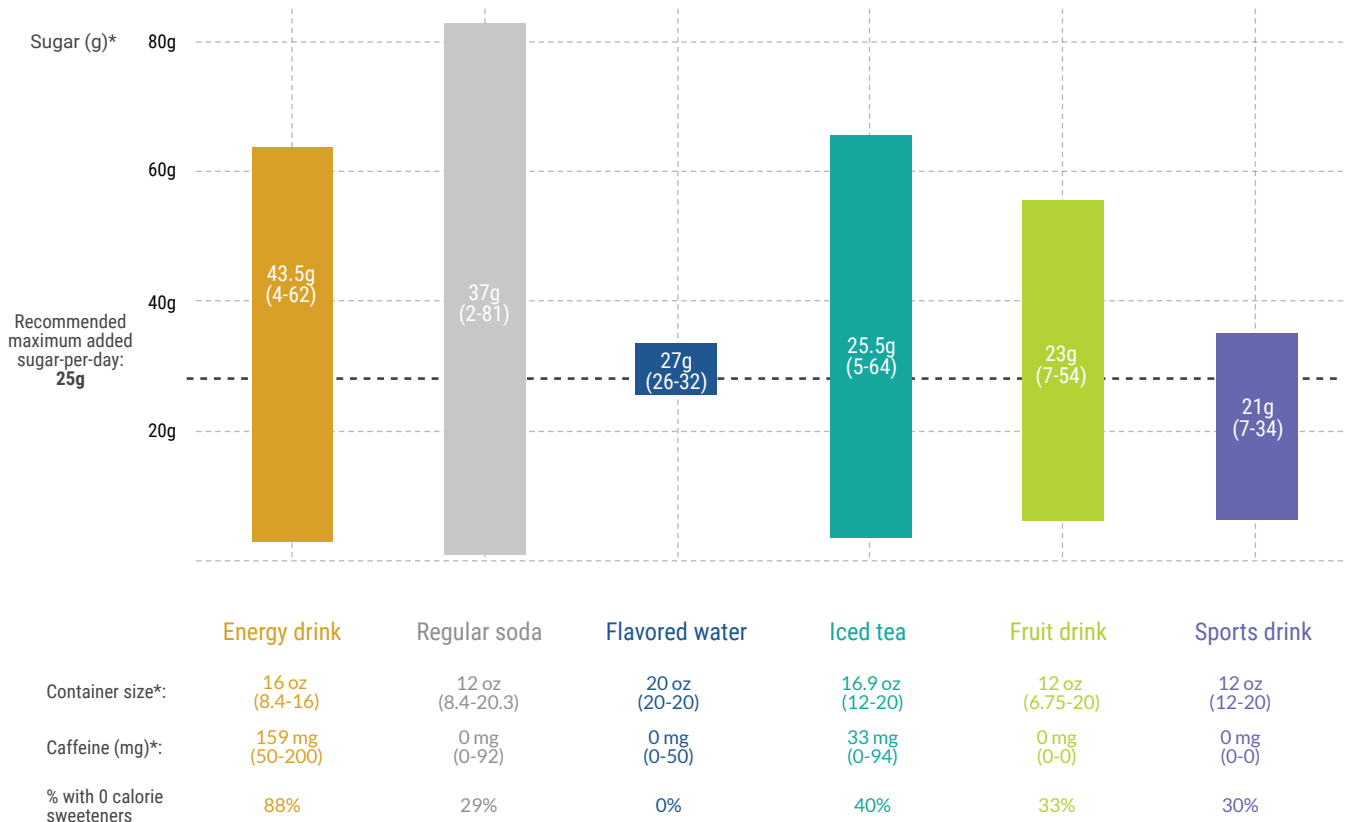
categories often exceeded these limits, with up to 81 grams of sugar in a 20-ounce soda, more than 60 grams in a 16-ounce energy drink and an 18.5-ounce iced tea, and more than 50 grams in a 16-ounce fruit drink.

In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends against youth under age 18 consuming energy drinks due to health risks from intake of high levels of caffeine and other stimulants in these drinks.³ The energy drinks and shots examined contained a median of 160 milligrams of caffeine, and up to 350 milligrams in a 16-ounce serving. In addition to their high sugar content, 88% of sugar-sweetened energy drinks also contained zero-calorie sweeteners. The AAP statement also recommends against children and teens consuming sports drinks due to their sugar content.

Furthermore, we found little evidence that companies have begun to allocate more of their advertising dollars to lower-calorie or diet drinks. Regular soda and soda brands continued to outspend diet soda by 98% (\$586 vs. \$296 million in total ad spending), while sugar-sweetened sports drinks, iced tea, fruit drinks, and flavored water outspent diet varieties (i.e., products with no added sugar) in the same categories by more than five times (\$298 vs. \$58 million). In 2018, sugary drinks and energy drinks represented 64% of all advertising spending for refreshment beverages (including plain and sparkling water, 100% juice, and diet drinks).

Most brands with lower-calorie and/or diet versions continued to primarily advertise their full-calorie products. Coke was the only soda brand to spend more on its diet varieties (Coke Zero and Diet Coke) than on its full-calorie Coke Classic (\$168 vs. \$147 million). The brand also introduced a lower-calorie variety, Coke Life with 24 grams of sugar per 12 ounces, but spent a small amount (\$8 million) to advertise the product. Glaceau Vitaminwater (Coca-Cola) was the only other sugary drink brand to allocate the majority of its advertising spending to a diet variety (Vitaminwater Zero), spending \$12 million in 2018, 90% of the brand's total advertising expenditures.

Diet Pepsi was another highly advertised diet soda, but the brand spent almost \$20 million more to advertise full-calorie Pepsi (\$99 vs. \$118 million). Two additional highly advertised PepsiCo brands offered lower-calorie and/or diet varieties – Gatorade and Mtn Dew – but primarily advertised their full-calorie versions. Gatorade spent \$115 million toward regular Gatorade, compared to \$15 million for lower-calorie G2 and \$4 million for Gatorade Zero. Similarly, Mtn Dew spent \$89 million on its full-calorie soda compared to \$17.5 million on lower-calorie Mtn Dew Kickstart. However, Kickstart was highly targeted to teens, with a teen-targeted advertising ratio (i.e., TV ads viewed by teens vs. adults) of 0.60, the second-highest sub-brand in our analysis. The product contains 14 to 15 grams of sugar per 12-ounce can, zero-calorie sweeteners, 68.5 milligrams of caffeine, 5 to 10% juice, and uses the tagline "Juice + Caffeine + DEW." This product does not qualify as a healthier choice for teens.

Figure 16. Summary of sugar content of sugary drinks by category

*Median (range) per serving

Source: Nutrition analysis (March 2020)

How has sugary drink and energy drink advertising spending changed?

More than one-half of the \$1,038 million spent to advertise sugary drinks in 2018 was devoted to regular soda and soda brands (i.e., ads that included only a brand logo or that featured both regular and diet varieties). This \$586 million in regular soda/soda brand advertising represented a 41% increase versus 2013. Spending on sports drink advertising also increased by 24%, totaling \$159 million in 2018; and advertising for iced tea almost tripled, from \$38 million in 2013 to \$111 million in 2018.

Energy drinks (including zero-calorie drinks and shots) ranked third in total advertising spending (\$115 mill) in 2018, but it was the only top category that spent less to advertise in 2018 than in 2013 (-34%). Ad spending on fruit drinks and flavored water (excluding children's drinks) also declined by 5%, although combined spending for these categories was only \$28 million.

Are preschoolers, children, and teens seeing less TV advertising for sugar drinks?

From 2013 to 2018, the amount of time that young people spent watching TV declined significantly: by 35% for preschoolers (2-5 years), 42% for children (6-11 years), and 52% for teens (12-17 years). Given these significant reductions in time spent watching TV, the number of TV ads viewed should have declined by similar amounts. However, preschoolers saw 26% more TV ads for sugary drinks in 2018 than in 2013, and children saw 8% more ads (139.4 and 135.0 TV ads viewed on average in 2018). Teens' exposure to sugary drink ads declined by 35% to 169.3 ads viewed, but this decline was less than expected given the 52% reduction in TV viewing time for this age group.

Furthermore, changes in exposure to TV ads from 2013 to 2018 varied widely by sugary drink category. Ads viewed for regular soda/soda brands increased by 78% for preschoolers and 55% for children, while remaining flat for teens (+1%), totaling 72.1, 69.2, and 86.7 ads viewed in 2018, respectively.

In addition, exposure to TV ads for iced tea increased by 2.5 times or more for preschoolers and children and by 68% for teens (25.3, 25.0, and 29.0 ads viewed in 2018). In 2018, iced tea overtook energy drinks and sports drinks to become the second most highly advertised sugary drink category in ads viewed by all youth age groups (exceeded only by regular soda). Sports drink ads viewed by preschoolers also increased from 2013 to 2018 (+11%), while declines for children (-13%) and teens (-38%) were less than expected given reductions in TV viewing times (15.7, 15.3, and 21.1 ads viewed in 2018).

In contrast, there were notable declines in energy drink and flavored water ads viewed. Preschoolers, children, and teens saw less than one-half the number of energy drink ads in 2018 than in 2013. These reductions were due to approximately 75% fewer ads for one energy shot (5-hour Energy) and the discontinuation of another energy shot that had been highly advertised in 2013 (SK Energy). The other highly advertised energy drink brand in our analysis (Red Bull) increased its advertising to preschoolers and children (22% and 6%, respectively), but reduced advertising to teens by 44%. Nonetheless, energy drinks continued to rank third in number of ads viewed by all age groups in 2018 (behind regular soda/soda brands and iced tea), contributing 17.2, 16.6, and 23.3 ads viewed by preschoolers, children, and teens. The one flavored water brand in this analysis (Glaceau Vitaminwater) advertised primarily in magazines, spending less than \$200,000 in TV advertising for its sugar-sweetened varieties in 2018.

Advertising for sugary drinks that targeted children under 12 was reported previously in Children's Drink FACTS.⁴ None of the drink categories detailed in this report appeared to target preschoolers or children with their TV advertising. However, these categories contributed three-quarters of all sugary drink ads viewed by preschoolers and children in 2018; outnumbering ads for children's drinks by 3 to 1.

The current analysis did identify some sugary drink categories that were highly targeted to teen audiences as evidenced by disproportionately high ratios of ads viewed by teens versus adults (i.e., teen-targeted ratios). Energy drinks and sports drinks had higher than average teen-targeted ratios (0.53 and 0.52, respectively), while targeted ratios for regular soda/soda brands and iced tea (0.48 and 0.47, respectively) were comparable to differences in hours spent watching TV for teens versus adults. Flavored water had the highest teen-targeted ratio (0.60), but that was based on a small number of ads viewed.

How has targeting of sugary drinks to Hispanic and Black youth changed?

Sugary drink brands also continued to disproportionately target their advertising to Hispanic and Black consumers. In 2018, companies spent \$84 million on Spanish-language TV advertising, which was an 8% increase compared to 2013 and an 80% increase from 2010. Regular soda/soda brands

represented 61% of sugary drink advertising spending on Spanish-language TV (\$51 million), and sports drinks represented 33% (\$27 million). Energy drinks represented another 5% of Spanish-language ad spending (\$4 million). On average, companies allocated 10% of their TV advertising budgets to Spanish-language TV, but sports drinks devoted 21%, the highest of any category. There were no fruit drink or flavored water ads on Spanish-language TV (excluding children's drinks).

Changes in Hispanic youth exposure to Spanish-language TV ads from 2013 to 2018 also varied by category. Exposure to ads for regular soda/soda brands increased by 13% for Hispanic preschoolers (37.8 vs. 33.4 ads viewed) and 25% for children (32.1 vs. 25.7 ads viewed). Their exposure to ads for sports drinks increased more than ten-fold, reaching 9.4 ads viewed by Hispanic preschoolers and 8.5 ads viewed by Hispanic children in 2018. Hispanic teens' exposure to sports drink ads also doubled to 7.3 ads viewed in 2018, while their exposure to ads for regular soda/soda brands declined slightly (-7%, 24.1 ads viewed), despite a 56% decline in time spent watching Spanish-language TV. In contrast, exposure to Spanish-language TV ads for energy drinks declined by more than 90% for Hispanic preschoolers, children, and teens (approximately one ad viewed by all age groups in 2018).

Black preschoolers and children continued to view approximately twice as many sugary drink ads on TV in 2018 compared to White preschoolers and children, totaling 256.4 and 256.2 ads viewed, respectively. Black teens saw 2.3 times as many ads (330.9) as White teens saw. Black teens spend approximately 80% more time watching TV compared to White teens, so these large differences in ads viewed cannot be fully explained by differences in TV viewing times. Some sugary drink brands appeared to target Black youth by purchasing advertising during programming that was disproportionately viewed by Black youth compared to White youth (resulting in high Black youth-targeted ratios).

Categories with the highest ratios of ads viewed by Black versus White teens included flavored water (Black teens saw more than 4 times as many ads as White teens saw, but the number of ads viewed was low) and sports drinks (Black teens saw 47.2 ads, 2.7 times as many). Both regular soda/soda brands and energy drinks had Black teen-targeted ratios of 2.3 (170.7 and 45.5 ads viewed, respectively). Furthermore, targeted ratios for these categories increased from 2013 to 2018, whereas the difference in TV viewing times for Black teens compared to White teens declined by 44% during the same time period.

What companies and brands were responsible for sugary drink advertising?

Although these analyses reveal few improvements in sugary drink advertising from 2013 to 2018, increases were driven primarily by two companies: PepsiCo and Coca-Cola (see

Table 19. Summary of advertising and targeting by company: 2018

Company	Total ad spending		Avg # of TV ads viewed				Spanish-language TV ad spending		TV ads viewed by Black teens		Top brands (\$ mill ad spending)****	
	2018 (\$ mill)	Change vs. 2013	Children (6-11 y)		Teens (12-17 y)		2018 (\$ mill)	Change vs. 2013	2018	Change vs. Targeted ratio		
			2018	Change vs. 2013	2018	Change vs. 2013						
PepsiCo	\$391.9	28%	51.9	34%	68.6	-12%	\$37.6	121%	142.3	13%	2.53	Gatorade (\$133.6), Pepsi (\$144.6)**, Mtn Dew (\$108.0)**
Coca-Cola	\$320.8	81%	30.9	162%	35.4	50%	\$33.1	66%	66.2	28%	2.18	Coke (\$182.5)**, Gold Peak (\$29.6), Coca-Cola (\$27.9)***, Sprite (\$27.0)**, Powerade (\$21.4), Honest Tea (\$10.9)
Dr Pepper Snapple Group	\$132.4	16%	20.3	-11%	25.0	-42%	\$8.8	-57%	44.4	-39%	1.95	Dr Pepper (\$66.8), Canada Dry (\$31.0)**, Snapple Iced Tea (\$16.7), 7-Up (\$12.6)
Innovation Ventures	\$60.5	-39%	5.8	-81%	8.8	-88%	\$4.4	15%	17.9	-87%	2.29	5-hour Energy (\$60.5)
Pepsi Lipton*	\$54.1	200%	12.0	96%	13.9	28%	\$0.0	--	28.2	54%	2.36	Pure Leaf (\$35.3), Lipton Iced Tea (\$17.7)
Red Bull	\$47.1	-2%	10.3	6%	13.7	-44%	\$0.0	--	26.6	-37%	2.30	Red Bull (\$46.9)

*Joint venture between PepsiCo and Unilever

**Regular soda and soda brand combined

***Company-level ads

****>\$10 million

Table 19). PepsiCo was responsible for 38% of all sugary drink advertising spending and sugary drink TV ads viewed by children, as well as 41% of TV ads viewed by teens in 2018. Coca-Cola was responsible for 31% of sugary drink advertising spending, 23% of TV ads viewed by teens, and 21% of TV ads viewed by children.

Dr Pepper Snapple Group contributed another 13% of ad spending and 15% of ads viewed by children and teens. Three companies – Red Bull, Pepsi Lipton, and Innovation Ventures – together represented another 16% of ad spending and 21 to 22% of ads viewed by children and teens. Eighteen additional companies advertised sugary drinks in 2018, but together they accounted for just 2% of all advertising spending and approximately 4% of TV ads viewed by youth.

Within the top-six companies, sugary drink advertising was also concentrated among a small number of brands. Pepsi, Gatorade, and Mtn Dew (PepsiCo brands) and Coke each spent more than \$100 million to advertise sugar-sweetened varieties in 2018. Dr Pepper, 5-hour Energy, and Red Bull each spent \$47 million or more. All remaining sugary drink and energy drink brands in our analysis spent \$35 million or less.

Furthermore, four of the top-six companies increased their sugary drink ad spending from 2013 to 2018. Pepsi Lipton spending tripled, Coca-Cola spending increased by 81%, and PepsiCo spending increased 28%. Children viewed more than

twice as many TV ads for Coca-Cola sugary drinks in 2018 than in 2013 and 34% more ads for PepsiCo sugary drinks. Exposure to ads for Pepsi Lipton sugary drinks and Red Bull also increased. Pepsi Lipton was the only company with an increase in ads viewed by teens (+28%), but Innovation Ventures was the only company with a decline in ads viewed by teens (-81%) that was greater than the average decline in TV viewing time for teens.

Which companies and brands targeted their advertising to teens and Hispanic and Black youth?

Five of the top-six companies were responsible for brands that disproportionately targeted their advertising to teens. Highly advertised brands with the highest teen-targeted ratios included one brand each from five of these companies: Sprite (Coca-Cola, 0.54), Red Bull (0.54), 5-hour Energy (Innovation Ventures, 0.53), Gatorade (PepsiCo, 0.52), and Snapple (Dr Pepper Snapple Group, 0.52). Less-advertised sub-brands with high teen-targeted ratios included Fanta (Coca-Cola, 0.73, the highest ratio in our analysis), Mtn Dew Kickstart (PepsiCo, 0.60), Cherry Dr Pepper (Dr Pepper Snapple Group, 0.56), and Honest Tea (Coca-Cola, 0.54). These high targeted ratios indicate that brands purchased TV advertising during programming that was disproportionately viewed by teens compared to adults.

On Spanish-language TV, four companies – PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Dr Pepper Snapple Group, and Innovation Ventures – were responsible for 99% of sugary drink ad spending. Their Spanish-language advertising promoted just seven brands: Coke, Gatorade, Pepsi, Powerade, Dr Pepper, Honest Tea, and 5-hour Energy. From 2013 to 2018, PepsiCo more than doubled its Spanish-language ad spending on sugary drinks, and increased its spending from \$0.4 million in 2010 to \$17 million in 2018. Coca-Cola increased its Spanish-language ad spending by 66% from 2013 to 2018. Only Dr Pepper Snapple Group spent less to advertise sugary drinks on Spanish-language TV in 2018 than in 2013 (-57%).

PepsiCo and Coca-Cola were also responsible for five of the six brands with the highest targeted ratios of ads viewed by Black youth versus White youth (Black teen-targeted ratios ≥ 2.5): Glaceau Vitaminwater, Sprite, and Fanta (Coca-Cola) and Gatorade and Mtn Dew (PepsiCo). Lipton Iced Tea (Pepsi Lipton) also disproportionately targeted Black teens with its advertising.

Limitations

This report provides a comprehensive picture of advertising expenditures for all media, including TV, and TV ad exposure using syndicated market research data available from Nielsen, the most widely used industry source for data to analyze companies' media plans.⁵ However, beverage companies frequently target youth with other types of marketing that are not reflected in these data, including sponsorships, social media, and retail promotions.⁶ Other researchers have documented extensive use of youth-oriented sports and celebrity sponsorships to promote sugary drinks.^{7,8} We have also compiled examples of social media campaigns sponsored by sugary drink brands using common techniques that appeal to youth (available [here](#)).

Another limitation is that this report only analyzed targeted advertising on TV. TV advertising represented 84% of sugary drink advertising spending in 2018. However, children and teens are watching less commercial TV and increasingly use other types of media, such as streaming video and mobile devices.⁹ As noted throughout these analyses, changes in youth exposure to TV ads must be evaluated in the context of overall declines in TV viewing. Nonetheless, increases in ad spending and advertising targeted to teens resulted in increased youth exposure to advertising for many sugary drink categories, companies, and brands. Furthermore, social media and promotions continue to focus on TV commercials as the centerpiece of the campaigns.¹⁰ TV advertising remains the most reliable way for brands to reach the majority of young people with their marketing messages.

Finally, the nutrition analyses in this report only examined sugary drinks and energy drinks offered by brands that spent more than \$100,000 on advertising in 2018. Beverage companies

have publicized the introduction of new lower-calorie sugary drinks and diet drinks without added sugar in recent years.¹¹ However, sugary drinks represented two-thirds of advertising spending for all refreshment beverage categories combined in 2018 (including diet drinks, unsweetened plain and sparkling water, and 100% juice). Although healthier drinks can be found on supermarket shelves, beverage companies continued to devote the majority of their advertising resources to their high-sugar products.

Impact of sugary drink advertising

Another limitation of these analyses is that we cannot determine causal effects of this advertising on sugary drink sales or consumption. Furthermore, published data on consumption of sugary drinks lag behind advertising spending data, with 2013-14 representing the most recent comprehensive data on consumption by category.¹² However, the 2018 advertising data reported here document beverage company responses to changing patterns of consumption (and sales) in previous years. For example, from 2003-04 to 2013-14 regular soda consumption by children and teens declined by approximately 50%. Although companies had reduced advertising spending on regular soda by 11% from 2010 to 2013, they then increased it by 41% from 2013 to 2018 to exceed spending in 2010. Furthermore, substantial increases in advertising for sports drinks from 2013 to 2018 followed an increase in sports drink consumption prior to 2013-14.

Although we do not have access to proprietary industry documents that would explain the rationale for companies' advertising decisions, these advertising expenditures suggest a renewed focus on promoting regular soda. Given declines in regular soda sales and consumption, beverage companies may be using advertising to attempt to counteract changing consumer preferences and increased awareness of harms from consuming sugary soda. Similarly, an increase in advertising for sports drinks could capitalize on increased sports drink consumption¹³ and consumer perceptions that sports drinks are healthier than regular soda.¹⁴ Previous studies that examined changes in consumption of sugary drinks by category have not documented sugar-sweetened iced tea consumption separately. However, increased investment in this category would also make sense for a relatively small category with potential growth.

Targeting advertising to teens and Hispanic and Black consumers also represents a potentially profitable marketing strategy for some brands. Teens (and young adults) consume higher amounts of sugary drinks than other age groups.¹⁵ Researchers have also raised concerns about unhealthy food and drink advertising targeted to teens as youth in this age group tend to focus more on immediate rewards and have fewer concerns about the long-term consequences of their behaviors.¹⁶ They also present enormous potential as long-term loyal customers. Therefore, targeting sugary

drink advertising to teens takes advantage of their unique vulnerability to these persuasive attempts. For similar reasons, energy drink advertising takes advantage of teens' vulnerability to messages that portray these products as cool and a bit risky,¹⁷ which could help explain increases in consumption of energy drinks by teens.¹⁸

Food companies have publicized their rationale for targeting Hispanic consumers as a smart business strategy due to the growing size of this population and large family sizes, which make this segment especially profitable for many consumer goods.¹⁹ Companies have made fewer public statements about their rationale for targeting Black consumers. However, some have noted the importance of reaching “multicultural” youth and appealing to Black youth as “trendsetters” to create a “cool” brand image that appeals to all youth. They have not provided reasons for disproportionately targeting Hispanic and Black consumers with advertising for high-sugar, but not healthier, drinks. However, studies showing higher sugary drink consumption by Black and Hispanic youth²⁰ indicate potential benefits of this marketing strategy, despite the negative impact on health disparities affecting communities of color.²¹

Recommendations

These findings demonstrate that major beverage companies must do much more to support public health efforts to reduce consumption of sugary drinks, especially among youth and in communities of color. Furthermore, increased efforts by policymakers, public health advocates, and health practitioners are essential to offset the \$1 billion spent by beverage companies to advertise sugary drinks and reduce the harm they cause to public health.

Industry

Beverage manufacturers, retailers, and media companies must reduce marketing of sugary drinks, especially marketing that targets teens and Hispanic and Black consumers. Companies should support public health efforts by taking action to make healthier choices the easiest, most affordable, and most socially acceptable options for young people.

- Through current industry self-regulatory initiatives – including The American Beverage Association’s Guidelines on Marketing to Children²² and the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) – participating companies pledge to only advertise healthier options to children up to 11 years old.²³ At a minimum, these pledges should be expanded to restrict all sugary drink advertising to children up to 14 years or older.
- Companies must discontinue marketing and sales of energy drinks and shots to children under 18 due to the dangers these products pose to young people’s health and wellbeing.²⁴
- Companies participating in the Balance Calories Initiative have promised to increase marketing of lower-calorie beverages.²⁵ They must also promise to reduce marketing of all sugary drinks and devote the majority of their advertising expenditures to healthier beverages.
- Industry commitments to increase sales and marketing of healthier products – such as the Balance Calories Initiative,²⁶ Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation,²⁷ and Partnership for a Healthier America²⁸ – should address marketing of sugary drinks in Black- and Hispanic-targeted media and in communities of color.
- Media companies that own programming with large audiences of teens, including Black and/or Hispanic youth, should take action to reduce sugary drink advertising during targeted programming. For example, they could establish standards for amount of advertising for healthy versus sugary drinks or provide lower rates to advertise the healthiest drinks (e.g., unsweetened water and tea).
- All corporate responsibility initiatives to promote nutrition and/or health and wellness should also address targeted marketing of sugary drinks to communities of color and commit to discontinue targeted marketing that contributes to diet-related diseases in these communities.

Policymakers

Federal, state, and local policy actions are necessary to further reduce sugary drink consumption by children and teens and counteract excessive sugary drink advertising.

- States and localities should enact excise taxes on sugary drinks and invest the resulting tax revenue in community-defined programs and services to reduce health and socioeconomic disparities. Many evaluations of existing sugary drink taxes in U.S. municipalities and other countries have demonstrated that these policies effectively reduce sales.²⁹
- State and local governments should expand sugary drink restrictions and decrease sugary drink marketing to children and teens, such as further limits on marketing in schools and other youth-oriented settings.³⁰
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should establish regulations to address unclear labeling practices, such as requiring disclosures of added sugars, zero-calorie sweeteners, juice, and caffeine content on the front of product packages.
- Health warnings on sugary drink products would also increase consumer awareness and understanding about the health effects of consuming added sugar and help address misperceptions about the healthfulness of some sugary drink categories (e.g., sports drinks, flavored water).

- States and local municipalities should prohibit the sales of energy drinks and shots to minors under age 18 and require they be placed in low-visibility locations (such as behind counters). A proposed bill in the 2020 legislative session of the Connecticut General Assembly would have prohibited the sale of energy drinks to children under the age of sixteen.³¹
- The U.S. federal government should eliminate unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children as a tax deductible corporate expense.
- Public health campaigns to reduce sugary drink consumption should highlight that sports drinks, iced tea, flavored water, and fruit drinks are also sugary drinks, and that these products can contain as much or more sugar than soda. Campaigns should also inform youth and parents about the dangers of consuming energy drinks.

Public health advocates and health practitioners

Public health advocates and health practitioners also play an important role in raising awareness of harmful sugary drink and energy drink advertising practices, helping consumers differentiate between sugary drinks and healthier options, and persuading industry and policymakers to enact improvements.

- Grassroots and other advocacy groups should develop campaigns to highlight excessive advertising of sugary drinks, especially advertising that disproportionately targets teens and communities of color. Such campaigns have helped to counteract consumer concerns about potential sugary drink taxes in some municipalities.³² Advocates could also work with young people to create counter-marketing campaigns to expose predatory sugary drink marketing practices.
- Health and nutrition professional organizations (including the AAP, AHA, Academy of Pediatric Dentists, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics) have issued recommendations warning about potential harms of sugary drink consumption, including sports drinks and energy drinks, by children and/ or teens.³³⁻³⁶ These organizations and others should provide

additional recommendations and develop campaigns aimed at children and teens to raise awareness about these harms, especially for sugary drinks that are perceived to be healthier than soda and energy drinks.

- Pediatricians, dentists, registered dietitians, and other healthcare professionals should assess sugary drink and energy drink consumption by their patients and counsel them about the harmful effects of consuming these products.

Conclusions

Reducing sugary drink consumption is a key public health strategy to address the epidemic of diet-related diseases that threaten young people's health and contribute to health disparities in communities of color. In response to sugary drink tax proposals and other public health initiatives to reduce sugary drink consumption, major beverage companies have invested in well-funded anti-tax consumer marketing campaigns; lobbying to oppose taxes and other public health bills to reduce sugary drink consumption; sponsorships of health, youth, and Black and Hispanic organizations; and marketing campaigns promoting increased physical activity and counting calories to offset sugary drink calories.³⁷⁻³⁹

The data in this report reveal that companies also spent more than \$1 billion to advertise sugary drinks in 2018 and substantially increased their investments in sugary drink advertising – by more than \$200 million – compared to five years earlier. Furthermore, companies continue to target much of this advertising to teens and Hispanic and Black youth. Despite beverage company promises to reduce beverage calories consumed, sugary drink advertising continues to undermine public health efforts. To demonstrate their commitment to addressing the negative impact of sugary drink consumption, beverage companies must do more than increase marketing of low-calorie drinks. They must discontinue extensive marketing of sugary drinks that encourages consumption by children and teens and contributes to long-term negative impacts on their health.