



Public Health News

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LA County Children Begin Losing their Sweet Tooth

A new study assesses consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages

LOS ANGELES - Children in Los Angeles County are drinking fewer sodas and sugary drinks. According to a new study, Declines in Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption Among Children in Los Angeles County, 2007 and 2011, the percentage of children who consumed 1 or more sugar-sweetened beverages daily has decreased from 43.3% in 2007 to 38.3% in 2011. Despite progress, the percentage of children who consume a soda, sports drink or energy drink daily remains high.

"Given the growing evidence of the link between consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and obesity, reducing consumption of these drinks must continue to be a focus of our obesity prevention efforts," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "While the slight decline in consumption demonstrates that we're going in the right direction, there is still significant work to be done when more than 1 in 3 of our children is drinking a sugary drink every day and more than 1 in 5 children is obese."

The study analyzed information from the Los Angeles County Health Survey conducted in 2007 and 2011 and found the percentage of children who consumed 1 or more sugary drink per day was highest among children ages 12 to 17 and lowest among those aged 5 years or younger. Furthermore, the percentage was higher among Latino and African American children than among white and Asian/Pacific Islander children.

Obesity rates have increased in tandem with consumption of sugary drinks over the past 30 years. "The health consequences related to excessive consumption of sugary drinks are serious: the extra calories in these beverages may lead to obesity, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers" said Dr. Fielding.

Public Health Campaigns

Over the past several years, national, State, and local efforts have included:

- California enacted legislation in 2007 to prohibit the sale of most sugar-sweetened beverages on school campuses. In LA County, this policy was accompanied by intensive education on sugary drinks in schools, preschools, childcare sites, and other community settings.
- The "Rethink Your Drink" public education campaign launched in 2009 and encouraged individuals to be more aware of nutrition facts labels and the calories consumed from sugar-sweetened beverages.
- The Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which serves more than 50% of children younger than 5 years of age in the county, has provided intensive bilingual education on sugary drinks since 2007.
- In 2012, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health began a "Sugar Pack" public education campaign, asking residents "You Wouldn't Eat 22 Packs of Sugar, Why Are You Drinking Them?" that includes an online Sugar Calculator that allows residents to learn how many packs and pounds of sugar they consume in sugary drinks each week, as well as how much these drinks cost over time.
- Additionally, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is working closely with childcare providers, schools, cities and employers to increase access to healthy foods and beverages in high-need communities.

"Community education, accompanied by environmental strategies to reduce demand for sugary drinks, including interventions in school and childcare settings, are likely to have the greatest effect, as are efforts to counter the influence of beverage industry marketing practices," said Dr. Fielding.

The full report, Declines in Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption Among Children in Los Angeles County, 2007 and 2011, is available by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at

http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2013/13_0049.htm. The Los Angeles County Health Survey can be viewed at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/hasurveyintro.htm>.

For more information on nutrition and healthy eating, connect with Public Health's Choose Health LA online, which provides information on chronic disease and injury prevention public health efforts in LA County. Visit Choose Health LA on Twitter @ChooseHealthLA, on Facebook and at ChooseHealthLA.com.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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