

Fight obesity? Add sales tax to soda tab

16 September 2009



Presenting a united front in the war on obesity, diabetes and other nutrition-related disorders, seven of America's leading public health and economics experts are urging passage of taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB).

Their report, which suggests how such taxes could improve nutrition as well as recoup some of the country's enormous healthcare costs related to these diseases, appears in the October 15 print edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and online at nejm.org on September 16.

Citing numerous studies, the authors show that SSB consumption has been linked to problems such as heart disease, diabetes and most notably weight gain due to increased caloric intake. With medical costs for overweight and obesity alone estimated to be \$147 billion (9.1% of U.S. healthcare expenditures), the authors suggest a tax on SSBs as a viable means to recoup some of these costs, and as a way to generate revenue that could be used for child nutrition and obesity prevention programs. The nation has a history of consumption taxes on tobacco, alcohol, and other products.

The authors propose a penny-per-ounce excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, which would raise about \$150 billion over a ten-year period. In a

single year, taxes at the state level would generate an estimated \$139 million in Arkansas, \$183 million in Oregon, \$221 million in Alabama, \$928 million in Florida, \$937 million in New York, \$1.2 billion in Texas, and \$1.8 billion in California. A tax calculator at www.yaleruddcenter.org/what_we_do.aspx?id=271 estimates revenue figures for states and 25 major cities.

Kelly Brownell, Director of Yale's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, notes: "A tax on sugared beverages has four features that make it unique: It would have immediate impact; it would have a beneficial effect on the nation's diet; unlike education programs, it costs nothing; and it would generate considerable revenue that could support key health programs. I know of no other approach that meets all these criteria."

The authors of "The Public Health and Economic Benefits of Taxing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages" include: Kelly D. Brownell, Ph.D., Yale University; Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H., New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Walter C. Willett, M.D., Dr.P.H., Harvard School of Public Health; Barry M. Popkin, Ph.D., University of North Carolina; Frank J. Chaloupka, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago; Joseph W. Thompson, M.D., M.P.H., Surgeon General for the State of Arkansas; David S. Ludwig, M.D., Ph.D., Harvard Medical School.

Provided by Yale University

APA citation: Fight obesity? Add sales tax to soda tab (2009, September 16) retrieved 5 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-09-obesity-sales-tax-soda-tab.html>

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