

ISSUE BRIEF
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Sugary Drinks and Latino Kids

Introduction

Latino kids consume an above-average amount of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), including soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, and flavored milk. This greater SSB consumption contributes to increased rates of obesity, diabetes, and other health issues that disproportionately affect the Latino community.

Pricing interventions, such as SSB taxes, exclusion of SSBs from food assistance programs, and subsidization of healthier beverages, have been suggested to reduce SSB consumption.

SSB taxes in particular have been proposed in several areas, with many proposals earmarking new revenues for obesity-prevention and other health-promotion efforts.

While projections about the effects of such a tax vary, most research concludes that some impact on decreasing consumption levels would result from a tax that is higher than current sales tax rates.

The Evidence

Latino kids get a significant portion of daily calories from SSBs.

- Latino kids have increased their consumption of SSBs over the last decade, up from an average of 71 calories per day from fruit drinks and soda to 111 per day, and from 39 calories per day from high-fat, high-sugar milk to 75 per day.

Latino kids drink more SSBs than their non-Latino white peers.

- One study found that 74 percent of Latinos have consumed some SSBs by age 2, compared with 45 percent of non-Latino whites.
- Another study found that about 22 percent of Latino high-school students drink three or more SSBs per day, compared with 19.6 percent of white students. Latino students also more frequently consumed sports and energy drinks.
- Studies suggest that individuals with lower socioeconomic status and immigrants with a higher degree of acculturation are more likely to drink more SSBs.

Greater SSB consumption among children is linked to higher body weight.

- Several studies show that, compared with those who drink fewer SSBs, children who consume more SSBs tend to have higher body weight and greater risk of weight-related issues, such as diabetes and dental problems.
- One study found that children's risk of becoming obese adults increases by 60 percent for each additional SSB serving per day.
- Latino youth are more likely to be overweight than their white peers.



ABOUT THIS ISSUE BRIEF

This issue brief is based on a joint research review from *Salud America!* and *Bridging the Gap*. The issue brief and research review were prepared by Frank J. Chaloupka, Ph.D., distinguished professor of economics and public health, University of Illinois at Chicago, project director for *Bridging the Gap*, and Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., and Kipling J. Gallion, M.A., University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, director and deputy director of *Salud America!*, respectively. The full research review, which includes citations, is available at www.salud-america.org.

For more information on *Salud America!*, visit www.salud-america.org.

For more information on *Bridging the Gap*, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org.



Latino youth are more exposed to the media, including beverage marketing.

- Market research names Latinos as targets for non-alcoholic beverage companies.
- Latino youth are heavy consumers of digital, mobile and viral marketing media. Food and beverage companies increased spending on such media by 50 percent from 2006 to 2009.
- One study found that TV viewing and soft drink consumption were associated with obesity, and Latino students watched more TV each evening and drank more soft drinks each day than their non-Latino white or Asian peers.

Sizable SSB taxes can reduce SSB consumption and may impact obesity rates.

- Two models have estimated that a 10 percent increase in soft drink prices would lead to a reduction in soft drink consumption of up to 12 percent.
- Most states currently impose small sales or other taxes on carbonated soft drinks as a way to raise revenue. Several experts noted that earmarking SSB tax revenues for obesity-prevention and -reduction efforts would improve weight outcomes.
- Several studies found little or no impact of existing, small sales taxes on weight outcomes; however, one study showed that higher SSB prices were associated with lower body mass index among school children, with a greater impact on Latinos.
- One study found that a penny-per-ounce tax (i.e., about a 20 percent price increase if fully passed on to consumers) would decrease SSB consumption by up to 24 percent, which, researchers predict, would decrease obesity and diabetes rates.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Conclusions

- Current sales and other taxes on soft drinks have a modest impact on SSB consumption because these taxes tend to be small and thus have a small impact on price. The taxes also do not differentiate between different types of SSBs.
- A more sizable excise tax on all SSBs could have a more significant effect on consumption of SSBs and could improve weight and health outcomes at the population level. Limited existing evidence suggests that the effects would likely be greater for Latinos.

Policy Implications

- A specific excise tax—rather than a sales tax or an *ad valorem* excise tax—that covers all SSBs (not just soda), could have greater impact on SSB consumption and weight outcomes. The impact on weight will almost certainly be greater when tax revenues go toward obesity-prevention and other health-promotion efforts.
- Other interventions to raise the price of SSBs relative to healthier beverages, including exclusion of SSBs from food assistance programs, and subsidization of healthier beverages, are also likely to reduce SSB consumption and potentially improve weight outcomes.