

Debate!

Should sugary drinks be taxed? Send us your opinion by December 1!

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Over the years, many cities and states have tried to pass a tax on sweetened beverages. Last week, Berkeley, California succeeded. The city in northern California will charge a penny-per-ounce tax on most sugary drinks. The tax is expected to raise more than \$1 million annually to combat obesity.

Makers of soda and other sugary drinks are against the tax. They say singling out one product will not solve the obesity problem in America. They also argue that a tax is an attack on personal freedom. “Families should be able to make the choice for their kids without government stepping in,” Chris Gindlesperger told TFK. He’s a spokesperson for the American Beverage Association.

Gindlesperger says that the fight against obesity is more successful when government partners with industry. He points to how the beverage industry worked with with President Bill Clinton’s administration in the 1990s to replace sugary drinks in school vending machines with water, milk, and 100% fruit juice. More recently, the beverage industry listened to First Lady Michelle Obama’s suggestion that labels on sugary drinks be clearer. Containers of up to 20 ounces will show the total calories on the front.

Sweetened beverages are the biggest source of added sugars in the American diet. High intakes of sugar can lead to obesity, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and other health problems. “This is the first generation of children who won’t live as long as their parents,” Dr. Rachel Johnson told TFK. She is a spokesperson for the American Heart Association.

Those who are in favor of the tax acknowledge that the beverage industry has taken steps to put the brakes on the obesity epidemic. But these efforts are not enough to overcome a huge health problem.

Supporters say a tax is a surefire way to help reduce obesity in the U.S. “There is good evidence that taxes result in less consumption of sugary

drinks,” says Johnson. She points to Mexico as an example. The country enacted a tax on soda in January, and sales have already dropped by 10%. What’s more, sales of healthier drinks have increased. Bottled water sales are up by 13%. Milk and sparkling water sales are up by 7%.

Another aim of the tax is to raise money to fight childhood obesity. Money will be used to build playgrounds, create educational materials, and promote the purchase of healthier foods. “We’ve already made a dent in this epidemic,” says Dr. Johnson. “I’m confident that we’re going to see even bigger progress soon.”

What do you think? Should sugary drinks be taxed?