

Policy Snapshot: Sugary Drink Warning Labels

Consumers deserve to know how sugary drinks affect their health. Requiring beverage companies to put this simple and accurate statement on cans, bottles, and dispensers of sugary drinks and on menus and ads that promote them, will alert consumers to health risks, and may discourage parents from buying sugary drinks for their kids.



Why Sugary Drink Warning Labels?

- Scientific evidence has clearly established that sugary drinks harm health, contributing to our alarming rates of diabetes, obesity, heart and liver diseases, and tooth decay.
- Sugary drinks have no nutritional value but are the #1 source of added sugars in our diet, representing almost half (46%) of all added sugars we consume.
- Sugary drinks are especially harmful because sugar delivered in liquid form bypasses the body's defense against consuming too many calories: sugary drinks don't make you feel full.
- Warning labels inform parents. In a recent study, parents who saw warning labels were less likely to choose sugary drinks for their children.
- Beverage companies spend close to a billion dollars every year to convince us, and especially our children, to drink these beverages. But they don't warn us of the risks.

What Can Warning Labels Do?

- Provide consumers with clear and accurate information about how sugary drinks are associated with increased risk of obesity, diabetes, heart, and liver diseases, and tooth decay.
- Promote further public discussion about sugary drinks and policy actions to reduce their availability, affordability and appeal.



Sugary drinks include soda, fruit-flavored drinks, flavored water, sports and energy drinks, and sweetened coffee and teas.

Additional Considerations

- Local and state governments can put carefully worded laws into place that require warning labels.
- Warning label policies should specify exact language that is likely to withstand legal challenge.
- Warnings can be placed on sugary drink containers, outdoor advertising, menus and vending machines.
- At this time, local laws have focused on placing warnings on advertising only, because legal analysis suggests this reduces vulnerability to lawsuit.
- The size of the warning label is typically determined by the size of the container, advertisement, or menu.
- Specific beverages may be declared exempt, such as 100% fruit or vegetable juices, infant formula, or any beverage whose principal ingredient is milk.

Momentum Is Growing for Warning Label Policies

- Warning label legislation has been filed in California, Hawaii, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington, as well as in San Francisco and Baltimore.
- Public opinion polls consistently show substantial support for warning labels.

San Francisco in 2015 became the first U.S. jurisdiction to pass a warning label bill. It requires labels on outdoor advertising. The American Beverage Association (ABA) immediately sued to block implementation. However, a federal District Judge dismissed industry arguments and concluded the City's mandated warning is factual and accurate; moreover, warning that sugary drinks contribute to tooth decay, obesity and diabetes is reasonably related to the City's interest in public health and safety. While industry has appealed, it is unlikely to win.



For More Information

This fact sheet was produced by Healthy Food America, which works to reduce the unacceptable level of added sugars in the American diet, by promoting policy and changing industry practice. For more information, visit www.healthyfoodamerica.org or email us at info@hfamerica.org.

Visit [ChangeLab Solutions](#) for a model warning label policy.

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