

EXTENDING THE SOFT DRINKS INDUSTRY LEVY



Addressing high sugar levels in juice and milk-based drinks

CONTEXT

- Excessive sugar and calorie intake is a major contributor to high and rising levels of overweight and obesity in children and adults,
- **Obesity costs the UK £58 billion annually**, equivalent to 3% of the 2020 UK GDP, including lost productivity and costs to the NHS of £6.5 billion.
- Excessive sugar consumption also causes tooth decay, with **oral diseases being the leading reason** 5–9-year-olds in the UK are admitted to hospital.
- The Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL), seen as a success for public health and business, has reduced the sugar content of soft drinks by ~45%. However, **juice and milk-based drinks were excluded** from the SDIL and instead covered by the voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme, with mixed results.



4 in 10 children leave primary school **above a healthy weight**

46,000

tonnes of sugar removed from soft drinks, as a result of the successful Soft Drinks Industry Levy

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



>1/3 drinks in major high street coffee shops **exceed** an adult's daily limit of sugar per serve



3 in 5 drinks would have a 'red' (high) label for total sugars, if their nutrition labelling were more transparent



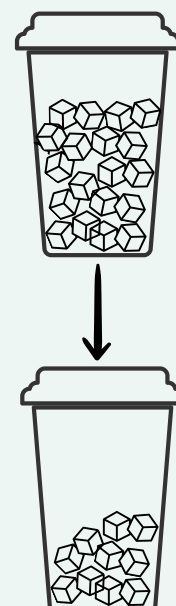
These drinks are a **key contributor** of calories and sugar to diets and can be reformulated

RECOMMENDATION

Extend the current Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) across ALL juice and milk-based drinks

There is **support for extending the SDIL** to juice and milk-based drinks including from the then Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Professor Dame Sally Davies in her independent review of childhood obesity. **Industry stakeholders** have also questioned why they were excluded from scope in the first place. There are **several international examples** of taxes that cover juice or milk-based drinks including in Malaysia and Peru.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) are due to release a report on milk-based drinks in 2024, to **inform a decision by HM Treasury** on whether they should be brought into the SDIL. On the basis that these products - and juice-based drinks - are **major contributors of calories and sugar to diets** and relatively easy to reformulate, **we are calling for both juice and milk-based drinks to be included in the SDIL.**



BACKGROUND

In 2016, the Government published its Childhood Obesity Plan, proposing several measures to reduce childhood obesity, including a 20% reduction in the sugar content of products that contribute most to children's sugar intake. The SDIL and the voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme were two key policies introduced to help achieve this.

In December 2022, OHID published new data on the SDIL and the final report on the Sugar Reduction Programme. The **SDIL achieved a 46% reduction** in sales weighted average sugar between 2015 and 2020 for retailer and manufacturer products and a 44% reduction in the simple average sugar between 2017 and 2020 for out of home products.

In contrast, **much smaller reductions** in the sugar content of food and drink have been achieved **under the voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme**. In certain product categories, some companies made good progress, highlighting the scope for reformulation. However, for juice and milk-based drinks specifically, **only five out of the eleven product categories have met their target**; in some categories sugar content actually increased.

UNDERLYING RESEARCH



Product Survey: Coffee Shop Drinks and Sweet Foods

About the research: Nutrition data on over 450 drinks, including juice and milk-based drinks, were collected from high street coffee shop chains with declared nutrition information. Results showed sugar levels in drinks served in the out of home sector remain high, despite juice and milk-based drinks being included in the voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme. Over a third of products have >30g sugars/serve, which is an adults' maximum recommended daily limit of sugar. Around three in five drinks sold would also have a 'red' (high) label for total sugars, if their nutrition labelling were more transparent.

This work was carried out by Action on Sugar, a group of experts concerned with sugar and obesity and its effects on health. It is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high calorie diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugar and fat in processed foods to prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay.

