

Energy drink guidance for professionals working with children and young people

Context and purpose

In 2018 a government consultation took place to seek views on a proposed ban on selling energy drinks to children and young people. This was announced as part of Childhood Obesity: a plan for action, chapter 2. The aim of the policy is to prevent excessive consumption of high-caffeine energy drinks by children. There have been strong calls from parents, health professionals, teachers and retailers to end the sale of energy drinks to children. This document aims to raise awareness of the contents and effects of energy drinks to parents, children and young people.

What are energy drinks and how do they affect children and young people?

Energy drinks are soft drinks that contain higher levels of caffeine than other soft drinks, and may also contain a high amount of sugar. Under current labelling rules, any drink, other than tea or coffee, that contains over 150mg of caffeine per litre requires a warning label saying: 'High caffeine content. Not recommended for children or pregnant or breast-feeding women'. Evidence suggests that excessive consumption of energy drinks by children is linked to negative health outcomes such as headaches, sleeping problems, irritation, tiredness and low concentration levels.

Why should we be concerned?

Recent evidence shows that more than two thirds of UK children aged 10-17, and nearly a quarter of those aged 6-9, are energy drink consumers. Adolescents (aged 10-17) who drink energy drinks are drinking, on average, 50% more than the EU average for that group. Evidence also suggests that children may not be aware of the potential health implications of consuming energy drinks; a European study found that 42% of children aged 3-9 could not confidently tell the difference between energy drinks and other soft drinks.¹

What you can do to raise awareness with parents, children and young people

- Raise awareness of the contents of energy drinks – Sugar, caffeine, taurine (excessive amounts of taurine are known to be harmful to health).
- Raise awareness of the possible negative effects of energy drinks - headaches, sleeping problems, irritation, tiredness and difficulties concentrating.
- Encourage children and young people to swap energy drinks for alternative soft drinks or limit how many energy drinks they are consuming.
- Encourage a healthy environment where energy drinks are not promoted.

¹Public Health Group/Obesity Branch/Childhood Obesity Team/10800 (2018), Consultation on proposal to end the sale of energy drinks in children, gov.uk
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736398/consultation-on-ending-the-sale-of-energy-drinks-to-children.pdf