

An Act to Protect Youth from the Health Risks of Sugary Drinks (S.1396)

Massachusetts bill S.1396 would improve the health of MA youth by making changes in schools and chain restaurants to improve the quality of foods available to kids and protect them from harmful marketing practices that contribute to overconsumption of unhealthy foods, including sugar-sweetened beverages.

The Problem

Youth overconsumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is harmful but preventable

- Eating a balanced diet is essential to ensure optimal health and growth for kids and teens, yet many struggle to achieve this. Adolescents, in particular, have the lowest diet quality of any age group¹ and overconsumption of added sugars is a major contributor to low diet quality among youth.²
- Sugar-sweetened beverages are the top source of added sugars in children's diets³ and are associated with weight gain,⁴ dental decay,⁵ and increased risk factors for cardiovascular disease.⁶
- The foods and drinks available at grocery stores, restaurants, and in schools play an important role in shaping youth diets. Children and teens are also frequently exposed to food and beverage advertising, which affects their preferences and choices.⁷

How will MA S.1396 protect youth?

At Chain Restaurants

Require added sugar warning icons on menus

- Warning icons would appear next to menu items with 50 grams of added sugars or more, equal to an entire day's worth
- New York City recently passed a similar policy⁸ (see Figure 1*)



Figure 1. Added sugar warning icon required on menus in New York City

Require kids' meals to meet nutrition standards:

- Contain no more than 600 calories, 770 milligrams of sodium, 35% of calories from total sugars, 35% of calories from fat, 10% of calories from saturated fat, and 0.5 grams of trans fat
- Contain at least 2 servings of fruit (not including juice or spreads), non-fried vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, or low- or non-fat milk, dairy, or cheese
- Beverages must be water (no added sweeteners or flavors), unflavored low- or non-fat dairy or non-dairy milk, or 100% juice with a maximum size of 6 ounces

In Schools

Reduce unhealthy food advertising

Prohibit unhealthy food advertisements on school property, including buildings, athletic fields, signs, scoreboards, buses, vending machines, uniforms, etc.

Stop the use of sugary drinks as rewards

Prohibit schools from participating in incentive programs that reward kids with free or discounted sugary drinks for reaching academic goals or reward schools for selling sugary drinks

Improve media literacy education

Encourage schools to teach media literacy skills in grades 3-12, including skills for evaluating advertisements for food, beverages, drugs, and alcohol

Why do we need to improve child nutrition and address unhealthy food marketing?

Chronic disease rates are high

In Massachusetts, 37% of adults reported having one or more chronic health conditions in 2021 and the state spends over \$41 billion on chronic disease-related costs annually.⁹ Many chronic diseases, including heart disease¹⁰ and type 2 diabetes¹¹ (which is on the rise among U.S. youth)¹² are linked to poor dietary habits, which often begin in childhood.¹

Excess added sugar intake contributes to chronic disease

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting added sugars to less than 10% of total calories (about 9-14 teaspoons per day, depending on age group and sex),¹ but on average U.S. youth consume over 40% more added sugar per day than recommended.¹³ Sugar-sweetened beverages account for 24% of added sugar intake in the American diet.¹ In childhood, excess added sugar consumption from sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with weight gain,⁴ dental decay,⁵ and an increase in risk factors for cardiovascular disease.⁶ In adulthood it is additionally associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes¹⁴ and cardiovascular disease.¹⁵

Restaurant foods, in particular, contain excess added sugars

Fast food and other restaurant foods play an important role in people's diets: 37% of U.S. adults consume fast food on a given day.¹⁶ Unfortunately, restaurant meals are often loaded with added sugars. An average default fast food combo meal contains 68 grams of sugar.¹⁷ A Large full-calorie fountain cola typically contains around 109 grams of added sugars (more than twice the recommended daily limit for most adults).¹⁸

Unhealthy food marketing is everywhere and poses particular risks for children

Children are constantly exposed to unhealthy food and beverage ads through television, online, and even in schools.⁷ In 2018, 23% of all advertisements that aired during children's television programming were for (mostly unhealthy) food or beverages.¹⁹ A 2019 study found that 72% of children and adolescents reported exposure to food or beverage marketing on various social media apps.²⁰ Even school-based online learning platforms feature ads from companies like Kellogg's and McDonalds.²¹ Children under age 8 are especially vulnerable to these ads, as they cannot understand their persuasive intent.²² When kids are exposed to marketing, they are more likely to request the marketed product.²²

**Co-sponsor S.1396 to protect Massachusetts youth from unhealthy food marketing
and help set them up for a healthy future!**

For more information, contact policy@cspinet.org.

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