



Sugar in Food and Drinks (Targets, Labelling and Advertising) Bill

Royal College of Physicians' briefing

Introduction

This briefing has been produced by the Royal College of Physicians ahead of the second reading of the Sugar in Food and Drinks (Targets, Labelling, and Advertising) Bill on Friday 22 January 2016. It outlines some key statistics on the prevalence of obesity in the UK and its financial cost to the NHS.

As Public Health England's recent evidence review on sugar highlights, consuming too much sugar and too many foods and drinks high in sugar can lead to weight gain, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers¹. The RCP supports evidence-based action on sugar, including measures to protect consumers from the pressures of unhealthy food marketing and equipping people with the information needed to make healthier choices.

Summary

- Sugar sweetened drinks and foods with high sugar content are a large contributing factor in obesity and overweight conditions, particularly among children.
- A significant proportion of the UK is obese or overweight, which has significant health implications for individuals and places a financial burden on the NHS.
- NHS costs attributable to overweight and obesity, i.e. treatments and services, are projected to reach £9.7 billion by 2050².

RCP's position

The RCP supports the overarching aims and principles of this Bill. The RCP believes that the causes of obesity are complex and a range of policy interventions should be pursued with the aim of reducing the prevalence of obesity. Greater regulation on the consumption of sugar is one of these interventions. There needs to be a strong regulatory framework and concerted action across all government departments to work on the prevention of health harms arising from obesity and poor diets. This is currently lacking.

¹ *Sugar Reduction: The Evidence for Action*. Public Health England. 2015

² *The Economic Burden of Obesity*. National Obesity Observatory, NHS. 2010

Comments on the Bill

Clause	Comments
1 (1a-c) Targets for sugar content in food	The RCP welcomes the implementation of this power under section 6 of the Food Standards Act 1990. As the secretary of state can already exercise this power, the RCP would welcome greater clarity as to why this power has not been exercised since the Food Standards Act was introduced.
1 (2) (3) Targets for the total amount of sugar consumed	The RCP supports the introduction of statutory targets on the consumption of sugar. The RCP would welcome dispatch box commitments on how the targets for the total amount of sugar consumed in the UK will be implemented and regulated.
3(a-b) Advertisement of food containing sugar	The RCP welcomes steps to present consumers with information about the products they are buying to help them make an informed and healthy decision. We strongly welcome steps to prohibit misleading food labelling.

Key statistics on impact of sugar consumption

- In England, around one in ten children in Reception class is obese (boys 9.9%, girls 9.0%)³
- Around one in five children in Year 6 is obese (boys 20.8%, girls 17.3%)
- Childhood obesity prevalence is strongly correlated with socioeconomic status and is highest in the most deprived Local Authorities in England.
- Around a quarter of men (26 per cent) and women (24 per cent) in England are obese, and 41 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women are overweight⁴.

Financial cost of obesity and sugar consumption to the NHS

- Dental decay is closely linked with high sugar consumption is the most common form of hospital admission for children. 26,000 children, aged five to nine, admitted to hospital in England in 2013-14, up 14% from 2011⁵
- Excess body weight costs the NHS £4.7 billion a year in treatments.
- Poor dental health costs the NHS £3.4bn per year respectively⁶.

³ Health and Social Care Information Centre. *National Child Measurement Programme 2013-14*.

⁴ Health and Social Care Information Centre. *Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet: England 2015*

⁵ BBC News. [Child tooth removal 'at crisis point', doctors warn](#). 12 July 2015

⁶ Public health England. *The Economic Burden of Obesity*. 2010

- The NHS is now spending more on bariatric surgery than on the intensive lifestyle intervention programmes that were first shown to cut obesity and prevent diabetes over a decade ago⁷.
- The cost of treating diabetes to the NHS is £9.8bn, with £1bn for Type 1 and £8.8bn for Type 2 which is closely related to diet. Instances of diabetes are expected to increase in the coming years⁸.
- Based on current projections of the rising prevalence of obesity and overweight conditions, it is estimated that the cost to the NHS could increase from between £6 billion and £8 billion in 2015 to between £10 billion and £12 billion in 2030.

About the RCP

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) plays a leading role in the delivery of high quality patient care by setting standards of medical practice and promoting clinical excellence. We provide physicians in the United Kingdom and overseas with education, training and support throughout their careers. As an independent body representing almost 32,000 fellows and members worldwide, we advise and work with government, the public, patients and other professions to improve health and healthcare. Our primary interest is to build a health system that delivers high quality care for patients.

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⁷ Public Health England, adult and child obesity statistics, updated 2014

⁸ Diabetes UK. *The Cost of diabetes*. 2014