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Beverage companies still target kids with marketing for unhealthy, sugary drinks

New Haven, Conn. – Beverage companies spent \$866 million to advertise unhealthy drinks in 2013, and children and teens remained key target audiences for that advertising, according to a new report released today by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. The report, Sugary Drink FACTS 2014, highlights some progress regarding beverage marketing to young people, but also shows that companies still have a long way to go to improve their marketing practices and the nutritional quality of their products to support young people's health.

While the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) regulates advertising placed in TV and other media where 35% or more of the audience is made up of children aged 11 and under, this report measures total exposure to TV advertising for sugary drinks by preschoolers (2-5), children (6-11) and teenagers (12-17), as well other forms of marketing they encounter

“Despite promises by major beverage companies to be part of the solution in addressing childhood obesity, our report shows that companies continue to market their unhealthy products directly to children and teens,” said Jennifer Harris, PhD, Yale Rudd Center's director of marketing initiatives and lead author of the report. “They have also rapidly expanded marketing in social and mobile media that are popular with young people, but much more difficult for parents to monitor.”

Sugary Drink FACTS 2014, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, updates a 2011 report on the same topic. Using the same methods as the last report, researchers examined changes in the nutritional content of sugar-sweetened drinks including sodas, fruit drinks, flavored waters, sports drinks, iced teas, as well as zero-calorie energy drinks and shots. They also analyzed marketing tactics for 23 companies that advertised these products, including amount spent to advertise in all media; child and teen exposure to advertising and brand appearances on TV and visits to beverage company websites, including differences for black and Hispanic youth; advertising on websites popular with children and teens; and marketing in newer media like mobile apps and social media. Researchers also examined changes in advertising of diet beverages, 100% juice, and water.

Dr. Harris presented the findings on Nov. 19 at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in New Orleans.

Key Findings:

Since 2010, overall level of marketing to youth on TV and children's websites has gone down. Companies also are providing more nutrition information.

- Children ages 6-11 viewed 39% fewer TV ads for sugary drinks in 2013 than in 2010; teens ages 12-19 viewed 30% fewer ads.
- Sugary drink advertising on websites primarily visited by youth declined by 72%.
- Coca-Cola Co., Dr Pepper Snapple Group, and PepsiCo now provide calories-per-serving on the front of most packages, and they enhanced nutrition information on their websites.

But not all companies are improving, and advertising is still overwhelmingly for unhealthy drinks.

- Preschoolers saw 39% more ads for PepsiCo's sugary drinks in 2013 than in 2010; children aged 6 to 11 saw 25% more
- Red Bull increased TV advertising to youth by 59%.
- One out of three TV ads for sugary drinks viewed by teens, and one out of four such ads viewed by preschoolers and children, promoted energy drinks. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, energy drinks "have no place in the diet of children and adolescents."
- Out of all advertising dollars, beverage companies continued to spend four times as much to advertise sugar-sweetened beverages as they spend on 100% juice and plain water; just 4% of their advertising spending was devoted to water.

Companies actively market on social media and via mobile apps, popular with youth.

- Coca-Cola, Red Bull, and Pepsi were the top-three drink brands in Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and YouTube views. Two additional energy drink brands – Monster Energy and Rockstar – ranked among the most active brands on social media.
- Child friendly mobile adverage apps include Fanta Fruit Slam, Fanta Fun Tap, Snapple Spiny Lobsters in Snaplantis, Mtn Dew Baja or Bust, Lipton Cool Cubes, and Sierra Mist Must Haves
- 5-hour Energy had the most-viewed YouTube video with 46 million views, while Red Bull's channel featured 4,200 different videos.

Beverage companies continue to target Black and Latino youth, who have higher rates of obesity than white youth.

- Black children and teens saw more than twice as many sugary drink ads on TV as their white peers.
- Spanish-language TV advertising for sugary drinks and energy shots increased by 44%.

Sugary drinks for children can have excessive amounts of sugar and artificial sweeteners, despite parents' concerns about serving them to children.

- A typical 8-ounce children's drink contains 60 calories and 16 grams of sugar – more sugar than recommended for most children to consume in an entire day.
- One-third of children's drinks contain artificial sweeteners.
- Their packages typically feature more than four nutrition-related claims and often highlight messages about reduced-sugar and no artificial colors or flavors but only careful reading of the ingredient lists reveals the artificial sweeteners.

"Industry self-regulation only limits advertising on a fraction of the TV shows and websites that youth see, and classifies children as adults the day they turn 12 years old, said Marlene Schwartz, PhD, director of the Rudd Center. "Our children deserve to grow up in a culture where they are exposed to messages that promote health, not sugar and caffeine."

The authors recommend that:

- Companies stop marketing sugary drinks and energy drinks to children and teens, and develop children's drinks with less than 40 calories per serving and no artificial sweeteners.

- Parents should ignore all the marketing claims on drink packages and check ingredient lists on packages of children's drinks for added sugar, artificial sweeteners, and juice content.
- Policy makers require transparent product labeling, including calories, added sugar, and artificial sweetener content on the front of all packaging.

The full report, a four page summary, and tools for consumers and researchers are available at sugarydrinkfacts.org. Follow the Rudd Center on Twitter at @YaleRuddCenter and take part in the conversation about the report at #sugarydrinkfacts.

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About the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Yale Rudd Center is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to providing high-level expertise and guidance on obesity prevention and food-related policy. Recently ranked by *Philanthropedia* as one of the most effective organizations among all U.S. nonprofits working on nutrition policy, the Yale Rudd Center serves as a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit www.yaleruddcenter.org. Follow the Rudd Center on Twitter at www.twitter.com/YaleRuddCenter or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/YaleRuddCenter.

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