Too Sweet?

The implications of the sugar tax

The Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) – alternatively known as the “sugar tax” - was first introduced at the 2016 Government budget meeting and will be legislated in April 2018. A tax of 18p and 24p per litre will be implemented according to two bands: the first for drinks with sugar content above 5g/100ml and a second for those with over 8g/100ml. Aiming to reduce childhood obesity, the campaign for a sugar tax has been occupying headlines for some time, but what is the evidence behind this controversial cause and what will be the impact on us?

According to the Government’s website, “the levy directly targets the producers and importers of sugary soft drinks to encourage them to remove added sugar, promote diet drinks, and reduce portion sizes for high sugar drinks.” Successfully introduced in Mexico, France, Finland and Hungary, taxes on soft drinks have been proven effective. The United Kingdom’s levy has the aim of ensuring producers act themselves, as opposed to increasing the cost for soft drink consumers – a concept urged by over 60 public health organizations. This means that the SDIL will not necessarily have a negative impact on customers, as presumed, but will hopefully improve their health instead.

Various high profile figures have been publicizing the need for a tax, in the media – including Chef Jamie Oliver. In an interview with BBC Good Food, he commented “there's so much more consumption of processed food and sugar-sweetened drinks that it's no surprise we've got a broken relationship with food.” In fact, sugar was recognized as the most prominent contributor to obesity and type-2 diabetes in a Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition report.

Targeted at reducing childhood obesity, it is crucial that the key audiences for this legislation are aware of the risks of over consumption of sugar. Our Food Technology teacher commented that it is very important to make students aware of the risks of sugar because “it is a very relevant topic and more awareness needs to be carried out not only in food technology, but PSHE as well.” Children aged between four and ten get 30% of their sugar intake from soft drinks and whilst they may be enjoyable, over consumption can lead directly to diseases such as tooth decay, diabetes and obesity – as well as shortening your life expectancy.

Therefore, it appears that there are significant benefits of this tax for consumers. However, it’s not all good news. Whilst there may be health benefits, there are serious economic implications for soft drinks companies. For example, Gavin Partington, Director General of the British Soft Drinks Association mentioned that he was “extremely disappointed by the government’s decision to hit the only category in the food and drink sector which has consistently reduced sugar intake in recent years - down 13.6% since 2012.” This view could escalate into soft drinks companies taking legal action. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that this legislation will not have as great an impact as a tax on other causes of obesity would, such as confectionary. The spokesperson for Britvic drinks agrees commenting that: “singling out soft drinks alone will not solve the obesity problem, given the small proportion of calories they contribute in the average diet."

Regardless of whether companies are satisfied or not, the Soft Drinks Industry levy will be introduced in April 2018. Undeniably there are great benefits, which will hopefully contribute to the collective cause of reducing childhood obesity.

For more information, visit the [Government's website]()

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The Soft Drinks Industry Levy will target drinks such as these, in order to reduce childhood obesity.