

MEDIA RELEASE

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1 in 6 teenage boys consume at least 52 litres of soft drink each year

The vast availability of cheap soft drinks, at home and at school, is encouraging Australian teenage boys to continue to guzzle down sugary drinks at an alarming rate, according to new Cancer Council research published today.

The research from the National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity survey, published in *Public Health Nutrition*, found that teenage boys are more likely to consume excess amounts of soft drinks than their female counterparts, and that soft drink consumption is also linked to other unhealthy eating and lifestyle habits.

Kathy Chapman, Chair of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee at Cancer Council Australia, said that the research indicates that over 150,000 Australian high school students drink at least a litre of soft drink a week. She is concerned that teenage boys in particular are putting themselves at higher risk of adult obesity, a known cancer risk, as well as other chronic diseases.

“A litre of soft drink a week may not sound like much, but over a year it equates to at least 5.2kg of extra sugar, and this doesn't even account for other sugar-sweetened beverages such as energy drinks, cordials and fruit flavoured drinks, or the sugar they consume in junk food and snacks.”

“Overall, almost 17 percent of teenage boys consume a litre of sugary soft drink a week, compared to just under 10 percent of females. Australian males already have poorer health in adulthood – including a shorter life expectancy, higher risk of dying early from chronic diseases, including cancer. Without action our next generation of men will continue to fall behind.

“Sugar-sweetened soft drinks are energy-dense and offer no nutritional value, there is no good reason for teens to be consuming them this often.”

Cancer Council researchers found that teens who perceived soft drinks to be convenient and good value for money were also more likely to consume too much.

“The research shows that soft drinks appeal to teenagers who see them as cheap and affordable beverage options. It's time for the Government to start more seriously considering a tax on sugar sweetened beverages to discourage this type of excessive consumption.

“While we are aware that soft drink consumption amongst teens has dropped in recent years, this new research discovered that high soft drink consumption is four times higher among students who had soft drinks usually available at home. Those who bought them at school were also more likely to be high consumers.

“Parents and high schools clearly have a role to play in discouraging soft drink consumption. The research suggests that those who drank a lot of soft drink were more likely to be accessing it through high school canteens or vending machines, said Ms Chapman.

The research is also believed to be the first of its kind to show that teenagers who drink a lot of soft drink are about twice as likely to not be eating enough fruit and consuming more junk food and energy drinks.

“Teenagers who consumed the most soft drink were also more likely to be spending more time in front of the TV and not getting enough sleep. What we are seeing is a clustering of unhealthy behaviours that are setting teens up for future chronic health conditions, soft drink is one part of a very worrying picture,” said Ms Chapman.

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About the study

“Factors associated with high consumption of soft drinks among Australian secondary school students” (by Scully, M. and Morley, B et al) has been published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*.

The National Secondary Students’ Diet and Activity Survey was established by Cancer Council Australia and the National Heart Foundation with the first data collection undertaken in 2009-10.

The NaSSDA survey is designed to be a regular monitoring system in which to track Australian adolescents’ body weight, dietary and physical activity behaviour. A nationally representative sample of 8,888 secondary school students in years 8 to 11, from 196 schools were surveyed in 2012-13.