

Proposals to make the food environment healthier

Introduction

I would like to respond to

both the consultation and call for evidence (parts 1 and 2)

Enforcement

Question 4. Should local authorities issue improvement notices in cases of non-compliance with restrictions as the first formal action, as set out in paragraph 19 of the consultation document?

Yes

Please explain your answer. If you disagree with the proposed approach, please outline what approach you would see instead.

We note that the likely enforcement body will be the local authority and have no objection to this proposal. However, it is essential that such enforcement responsibilities are accompanied with the resources required to carry out the role.

Additional comments

Question 19. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

RCGP Cymru Wales welcomes the focus on encouraging healthier choices among the people of Wales and thank you for the opportunity to comment. Our observations listed below are intended to be supportive of the objective, while providing constructive feedback to ensure an effective delivery of the policy ambition.

We note that the proposals overall tend towards restricting access to unhealthy choices rather than incentivising healthy selections. They are more 'stick' than (appropriately) 'carrot'. We appreciate this is, in part, a reflection of the levers that are available. However, we do feel there is a need to balance the 'stick' with the 'carrot' and would particularly point to scope to expand the network of free water refill points as an example of what could be achieved. The Welsh Government funded 'Refill' project is a significant step in the right direction, but it does rely a lot on the goodwill of businesses to provide free water refills. In practice, how many people would queue up in a shop with other customers purchasing items just to ask for a water bottle to be refilled. We think that to achieve a cultural shift there is a need to expand the network of publicly available clean, safe water fountains / refill points.

A further 'carrot' could include clarity for consumers on making healthy choices. Sugar-free for example does not necessarily mean healthier and a rounded approach to nutritional guidance which could be distilled to consumers by means of 'traffic light' style guidance would be beneficial to empower the consumer to make the healthier choice.

We would encourage a cautious approach to limitations on multi-buy offers with an eye to the potential impact on the cost of living. A multi-buy on goods which are likely to increase the intake of unhealthy food in one sitting will have a negative effect on the individual's health, but the purchase of two frozen items which even while they may not be the healthiest choices could be eaten a month or more apart and as part of a broadly healthy diet. Furthermore, it must be considered that a multibuy in some instances is just as likely to be two or more people making a saving by the joint purchase of food as it is one person eating an excessive amount of unhealthy food. We do not oppose the measures proposed, but we do urge robust consideration of the unintended consequences of this well-intentioned policy.

We agree with the proposed 'locations restrictions'. However, it is difficult to understand the logic for the exclusion of retailers with under 50 employees from these requirements. If the policy is sound for a medium or large store, it is unclear why it would not be for a smaller retailer. Indeed, it is possible that those on lower incomes may be more reliant on using the small local store rather than traveling to a supermarket and thus their choices could be dominated by unhealthy promotions while a more affluent customer is shopping in a store with these restrictions designed to steer them to healthier options, thus entrenching health inequality.

It is our view that it is correct the legislation enforcement should emphasise supporting compliance rather than penalising non-compliance. We note that the likely enforcement body will be the local authority and have no objection to this proposal. However, it is essential that such enforcement responsibilities are accompanied with the resources required to carry out the role.

Part 2: call for evidence in relation to the consumption of energy drinks by children

1. Health impacts and wider societal concerns

Evidence of the health impacts (both physical and mental) relating to the consumption of energy drinks by children, including qualitative and quantitative evidence and evidence of wider societal concerns for example, but not limited to:

Evidence of links with high-risk behaviours such as alcohol, drug or tobacco use, eating disorders, truancy.

Significant information on the negative physical health consequences of energy drink consumption is highlighted by the following:

- 'Energy drinks' – Pizzo, L., 2024. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Further information on physical consequences, as well as the mental effects of energy drink consumption, and their link to wider societal concerns such as increased risk-taking behaviour, and the usage of addictive substances, is highlighted by the following:

- 'Prevalence of energy drink consumption world-wide: A systematic review and meta-analysis' –

Aonso-Diego, G., Krotter, A., and Garcia-Perez, A., 2023. Available at:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37967848/>

- 'Energy Drink Consumption and Substance Use Among Middle and High School Students' –

Sampasa-Kanyinga, H et.al., 2020. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7246708/#:~:text=The%20association%20between%20energy%20drink%20consumption%20and%20substance%20use%20was,in%20relation%20with%20substance%20use.>

Is the evidence you have submitted specific to a particular age group?

Yes: under 18 years old

4. Operability

Evidence on the impact of voluntary bans to the sale of energy drinks to under 16 year olds implemented by some food retailers.

4a. Operability

Evidence on the approaches to enforcement, including how other countries have approached enforcement within different settings, including online.

The following research notes how other countries have imposed restrictions on the sale of energy drinks to children.

- 'Prevalence of energy drink consumption world-wide: A systematic review and meta-analysis' –

Aonso-Diego, G., Krotter, A., and Garcia-Perez, A., 2023. Available at:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37967848/>

6. Impact of the consumption of energy drinks on different groups

Evidence of how the following groups of children are impacted by the consumption of energy drinks.

6a. Those in lower socio-economic groups.

The following research provides evidence of the effects of energy drink consumption on children from different socioeconomic groups.

- Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption from 1998-2017: Findings from the health behaviour in school-aged children/school health research network in Wales – Morgan, K., et.al. 2021. PLoS ONE journal. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0248847>
- 'Inequalities in energy drink consumption among UK adolescents: a mixed-methods study' – Vogel, C, et.al, 2022. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36472075/>

Is the evidence you have submitted specific to a particular age group?

Yes: under 18 years old

Submit your response

You are about to submit your response. Please ensure you are satisfied with the answers you have provided before sending.

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