Sugary Drinks To Be Pulled From Schools
Industry Agrees to Further Limit Availability to Children

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The beverage industry is scheduled to announce today that it is voluntarily removing high-calorie soft drinks from all schools.

In an agreement to be announced by former president Bill Clinton, Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R) and the head of the American Heart Association, the industry also will limit the amount of other sugary beverages, such as fruit drinks, in school vending machines. But diet soft drinks will continue to be sold in high schools that allow such products.

The agreement sets different rules for elementary schools, middle schools and high schools and comes at a time when the beverage industry is under increasing pressure to limit sales of its least healthful products in schools. Many local jurisdictions, including the District and Montgomery and Fairfax counties, have limited the sale of soda in school. Some state legislatures are also pressing for restrictions; last year, California passed a law banning soft drinks in school, effective next year.

The agreement calls for eliminating sales of sodas, diet sodas, sports drinks, juice drinks, apple juice or grape juice in elementary schools. Water and more healthful juices such as orange juice could continue to be sold, but in only eight-ounce or smaller containers, according to sources who were briefed yesterday. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the plan had not yet been announced.

In middle schools, the same drinks will be offered but in containers as large as 10 ounces.

In high schools, the drink size will be limited to 12 ounces. No sugary sodas will be sold, and half the drinks offered will be water or a low-calorie beverage, such as diet soda, diet lemonade or diet iced tea. Sports drinks will be allowed, as will juice drinks as long as they have fewer than 100 calories per serving.

[Cadbury Schweppes PLC](http://financial.washingtonpost.com/custom/wpost/html-qcn.asp?dispnav=business&mwpage=qcn&symb=CSG&nav=el), [Coca-Cola Co.](http://financial.washingtonpost.com/custom/wpost/html-qcn.asp?dispnav=business&mwpage=qcn&symb=KO&nav=el), [PepsiCo Inc.](http://financial.washingtonpost.com/custom/wpost/html-qcn.asp?dispnav=business&mwpage=qcn&symb=PEP&nav=el) and the American Beverage Association have all signed onto the deal, Jay Carson, a spokesman for former President Clinton, told the Associated Press last night. Beverage industry officials did not return calls seeking comment about the agreement.

The agreement is an expansion of the industry's nine-month-old voluntary guidelines. In August, the American Beverage Association said that it would dispense only water or 100 percent fruit juice in elementary schools, but there was no size limit on the drinks. The industry also agreed to limit sales of high-calorie soft drinks in middle schools to after school hours, and in high schools, the industry said, it would limit soft drinks to 50 percent or less of a vending machine's options.

The agreement also comes as a coalition of lawyers who successfully sued tobacco companies has been threatening to sue soft-drink makers over selling sodas in schools. Joining that coalition is the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a public advocacy group that has aggressively pressed for more explicit food labels.

Last year, Clinton and Huckabee, both of whom have struggled with their weight and related health issues, launched an initiative, in collaboration with the American Heart Association, to combat childhood obesity.

The announcement follows a report yesterday by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Federal Trade Commission calling on the food, advertising and entertainment industries to limit their marketing of junk food to kids. However, the agencies said the industry should take all these steps voluntarily without further government regulation.

In a jointly released report on food marketing and obesity, the agencies said the industries should voluntarily set minimum nutrition standards for foods that can be marketed to children.

Noting that childhood obesity has doubled among young children and tripled among adolescents in the past 25 years, the report said companies must do more to promote more healthful products that are lower in calories and higher in nutritional benefits.

At the same time, it said, the licensing of popular television and movie characters should be revised to foster the promotion of more nutritious, lower-calorie foods.

The recommendations were not as strong as those issued late last year by the Institute of Medicine, which said Congress should mandate changes if food and beverage manufacturers fail to promote healthful products in the next two years. The national science advisory panel said licensed characters should be used to promote only healthful products.

Many of the report's recommendations follow efforts already underway. [Kraft Foods Inc.](http://financial.washingtonpost.com/custom/wpost/html-qcn.asp?dispnav=business&mwpage=qcn&symb=KFT&nav=el) last year announced it would stop advertising less nutritious products on television and radio and in magazines aimed at children under 12. Kraft Foods Inc. and PepsiCo also have reformulated many of their products to reduce fat and trim portion sizes.

Food and advertising executives praised the report. "We are pleased that the report does not call for further government regulations," Wally Snyder, president of the American Advertising Federation, said in a statement.

But advertising-industry critics said the recommendations were inadequate. Gary Ruskin, executive director of the public advocacy group Commercial Alert, called the report a "candy-coated present" for the food industry. "The report merely recommends more self-regulation, which has historically been a dismal failure."

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