



Sugar taxes and type 2 diabetes prevention: UK takes a step in the right direction

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Diabetes is one of the largest global health emergencies of this century, and its life-changing complications have a disproportionate human and economic impact in our societies. In 2015:

- More than 415 million people had diabetes worldwide;
- 5 million people died from diabetes-related complications;
- The management of diabetes and its complications placed an enormous financial burden on millions of individuals and its families, due to the cost of essential medicines and technologies;
- The diabetes impact on national health systems continued growing, reaching an expenditure of \$673 billion – 12% of the global health expenditure.

The above figures highlight the **urgency for national governments to develop strategies to stop the diabetes epidemic from continuing growing**. The only way to achieve this is by reinforcing efforts to prevent the onset of new cases of type 2 diabetes, which accounts for a very large proportion of total cases of diabetes cases – over 90% in many countries¹.

Poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles are among the main risk factors for type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, **recent studies have demonstrated strong associations between the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (including fruit juices) and increased risk of type 2 diabetes**. In its 2015 Framework for Action on Sugar, the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) called on governments to adopt initiatives (including taxes) to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and other high sugar foods and to incentivize the consumption of fresh drinking water instead².

On the 16th March 2016, the United Kingdom HM Treasury announced a levy on drinks with added sugars that will come into force on April 2018. **IDF welcomes this very important initiative by the government of the UK**, which with this measure now joins countries such as Mexico, France, Norway and South Africa in the taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages.

¹ *International Diabetes Federation. IDF Diabetes Atlas, 7 ed. Brussels, Belgium: International Diabetes Federation, 2015.*

² *IDF Framework for Action on Sugar. International Diabetes Federation, 2015.*

IDF also welcomes the commitment in England to dedicate revenues from the soda tax – an estimated £520 million a year – to fund primary school physical education and sport to fight sedentarism – another type 2 diabetes risk factor. We encourage the administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to also dedicate their respective shares to the promotion of physical activity among children. IDF would however ask the UK HM Treasury to reconsider the exemption from this scheme of fruit juices and milk-based drinks with high sugar content³⁴.

Taxation has proved to be one of the most effective measures to impact consumers' behaviour and discourage the consumption of a specific product. A recent British Medical Journal study suggest that, in Mexico, the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages declined an average of 6% in 2014, while the purchase of untaxed products grew an average of 4% during the same period of time⁵. Therefore, **IDF hopes that more countries will soon announce similar initiatives aiming at reducing excessive sugar intake and promoting healthy lifestyles**. Without efforts from national governments, type 2 diabetes will become an even bigger health, social and economic threat to future generations.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/budget-2016-some-of-the-things-weve-announced>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-35824071>

⁵ *Beverage purchases from stores in Mexico under the excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages: observational study. British Medical Journal 2016.* <http://press.psprings.co.uk/bmj/january/sugartax.pdf>