Sugary Drink Sellers Amp Up Ads to Youth, Especially Blacks and Latinos

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Although soft drinks are advertised to all U.S. teens and children more than ever before, African-American and Latino youth are special targets, according to study findings presented by Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity and reported by Reuters.

For the study, researchers examined marketing tactics used by manufacturers of more than 600 sugary drinks, such as soda, energy drinks, fruit drinks, flavored water, sports drinks, teas and even diet energy and fruit drinks.

Findings showed that between 2008 and 2010, kids and adolescents in general were exposed to more media ads for the sugary beverages. Of these youngsters, minorities got hit with more advertising than most. African-American children and teens saw 80 to 90 percent more sugary drink ads on TV when compared with white youth. And Latino youth were exposed to 99 percent more sweet drinks TV ads than white kids. What's more, 49 percent more ads for sugary drinks and energy drinks (some aimed at Hispanic preschoolers) appeared on Spanish-language TV stations.

One questionable tactic was to create ads that featured mostly young black actors playing sports. Other sneaky marketing maneuvers abound. "Companies have shifted from traditional media to newer forms that engage youth through rewards for purchasing sugary drinks, [though] community events, cause-related marketing, promotions, product placements, social media and smartphones," said Jennifer Harris, PhD, MBA, director of marketing initiatives at the Rudd Center.

Currently, around 15 percent of children are overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—and minorities face higher rates of obesity and diabetes than white youth.

So what can teens and parents do? Teens should check the nutritional facts behind the ads that target them, because it turns out often they're the ones getting played. And the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended parents stop serving their children sugary drinks and offer water, non-fat plain milk and only small amounts of 100 percent juice.

Click here to read about how state policies can reduce black adolescents' soda intake twice as much as that of other groups.

Click here to read the full Yale Rudd Center report on sugary beverages.

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