



Food Policy for Greater Health Equity
Webinar Q&A
December 11, 2020

Question #1:

Do we see a difference in sales or consumption by type of beverage (i.e. soda vs sports drinks, etc.)? Seems like soda is falling out of favor with consumers regardless of tax, but other sugary drinks are still perceived as being “healthier.”

Good Question. There are some papers underway to answer this so more to come. But in terms of what is published, an evaluation of the Cook County tax showed the largest declines in sales were for artificially sweetened drinks and soda. In Seattle, sales declined most for regular soda.

Question #2:

Has research been done in the markets with the SSB tax if water consumption has increased?

Much of the work is focused on sales not consumption. In Berkeley, sales of untaxed beverages (such as water) rose by about 3.5% in the first year (vs. 0.5% in the control areas). In Philly, we did not see an increase in sales of non-taxed beverages in the large retailers.

Question #3:

Do you feel a lack of public support for beverage taxes could serve as a significant barrier to their implementation? Also, do you feel consumers may change their views over time, and if so, what factors would be instrumental in this change?

Public support for beverage taxes has generally increased over time, but – generally – Americans do not like taxes. For high profile issues like beverage taxes, public opinion does matter. Strong, on the ground, efforts by coalitions are important and there are lots of good examples in the taxed jurisdictions. But, essentially, getting people to the table early and often and clearly communicating to various constituents is key. Healthy Food America may be a good resource to connect with about implementation questions.

Question #4:

It was mentioned that the volume-based taxes may diffuse more readily since they are simpler. What about a sugar-based tax? A sugar-based tax is also simple now that added sugars are on the nutrition facts panel, taxes the harmful ingredient in the product, may induce reformulation to products with less sugar (although if NNS are used replace sugar, the health effects of this substitution are not clear) and may be economically more efficient.

It's a good point. A sugar based tax is relatively simple (definitely much simpler than a tax). Some challenges that immediately come to mind are that no taxes use this model in the U.S. and there are only a few international examples. So, that may reduce diffusion. Also, in SA, where there is a sugar tax, didn't they find that prices rose similarly for high- and low-sugar beverage products rather than linearly on the basis of the tax design?