

Sugary drinks draw Contra Costa health campaign to persuade parents to give children water instead

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Posted:

MercuryNews.com

A campaign to persuade parents to give their toddlers and preschoolers water instead of sugary drinks has been launched by health and children's groups in Contra Costa County.

Ads in English and Spanish will appear on BART platforms, transit shelters, convenience store windows and in check-cashing facilities in Bay Point, Concord, Pittsburg, Richmond and San Pablo. The goal is to draw attention to the sugar in soda, flavored milk and juice boxes.

The ads depict the sugared drinks as toothy monsters.

Consuming such drinks puts children at higher risk of obesity, tooth decay and Type 2 diabetes, note leaders of the First 5 Contra Costa and Healthy and Active Before 5 collaborative.

The "Sugar Bites" ads, more information and a child-friendly interactive graphic depicting the health hazards of sugared drinks can be found at www.cutsugarydrinks.org.

In 2010, one in three low-income children in Contra Costa County ages 2 to 5 were overweight or obese.

Obese children are more likely to become obese adults, increasing their risk of heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, the groups note.

"The beverage industry spends millions marketing sugary drinks to children, especially Latino and African-American children," said Rhea Elina Laughlin, community engagement program officer for First 5 Contra Costa. "We think families deserve to know the truth about how harmful these beverages are for their children."

The American Beverage Association notes that calories from sugar-sweetened beverages make up only 7 percent of the calories in the average American diet. It also points out that beverage manufacturers have been offering more options for schools and the general public, including lower-calorie and smaller-portion choices.