

# REPORT to PARENTS

RP 34:7

## Energy Drinks—Too Risky for Kids

The latest dangerous trend affecting children is energy drinks. There are no age restrictions, so young children are routinely purchasing energy drinks at grocery and convenience stores.

### What Are Energy Drinks?

Energy drinks:

- Are carbonated beverages claiming to increase alertness and endurance;
- Contain up to 3,000 mg of stimulants per serving (compared with 34.5 mg in a can of Coca-Cola); and
- Common brands include Red Bull, Monster, and Rockstar.

### What Are the Risks?

Energy drink companies are marketing these drinks to children through television shows and sports advertisements. Adolescent males are quickly becoming the top consumers of energy drinks in this \$10 billion industry. A recent study titled "Epidemic: Teen Perceptions and Consumption" indicates that by age 12, one in three students had tried energy drinks. By age 14, 80 percent had tried an energy drink and nearly 50 percent consumed the drinks on a routine basis.

Energy drinks have large amounts of stimulants, including guarana (one of the



most potent sources of caffeine). While companies are required to state caffeine is an ingredient, they are not required to list other stimulants or to include the amounts. Companies are not required to list the potential risks of the beverages. Known side effects of consuming excessive stimulants in energy drinks include:

- Heart palpitations;
- Caffeine addiction;
- Severe headaches;
- Rapid heartbeat;
- Jolt and crash episodes;
- Jitteriness and nausea;
- Insomnia; and
- Increased propensity for strokes.

The long-term effects of children using energy drinks are unknown. Research

indicates that childhood energy drink consumption might be linked to future illicit drug use.

### What Can We Do?

**Talk to your kids** about the risks of energy drinks to prevent first trial. "Our children don't need more drugs (or more stimulants) like the caffeine these drinks contain, not to mention the empty calories provided by these drinks," says Denise Koo of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Speak to your pediatrician** if you suspect that your child may be experiencing these symptoms.

**Prevent energy drink consumption at schools.** Talk to your child's school about your concerns. Limiting students' access to unhealthy foods and beverages is important to their health. Restricting the use of energy drinks on campus, particularly for elementary and middle schools, can send a strong message about the potential harms of these beverages. An important step was taken by the Los Angeles Unified School District, which eliminated energy drinks from vending machines and school stores as part of its ban on sale of sugar-sweetened drinks, notes Steven Teutsch, chief scientist at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

This *Report to Parents* was written by Shoshanna Goldin.



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