

GOOD FOR YOU

Good for you! You've decided to take action to improve the health of your community. There's no better place to start than with kids and the drinks they consume. Individual and community health have many layers, but one thing is for sure: water is the best alternative to sugary beverages. By encouraging your community to drink more water and improving access to it, you can help promote better oral and overall health for children.

All too often, sugar sneaks its way into children's diets. We know it's in sweet cereals, cakes and candy. But it also hides in sugary beverages¹ behind healthy-sounding words like "fresh squeezed" and "natural." These items find their way into children's mouths morning, noon and night. We have been given misleading information when it comes to these drinks; their packaging may suggest healthiness, but in reality, many of these products are full of sugar.

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs):

- Regular sodas.
- Fruit drinks.
- Sport drinks (e.g., fluid- or electrolyte-replacement beverages).
- Energy drinks.
- Beverages that contain added caloric sweeteners (e.g., sweetened teas and premixed sweetened coffees).

Sugar-Containing Beverages (SCBs):

- Includes SSBs as well as beverages in which sugar, generally glucose or fructose, is naturally present, such as 100 percent fruit juice.

Sugary drinks have contributed to an epidemic of childhood obesity and tooth decay across the nation. Consider that drinking a ten-ounce juice box a day is equal to consuming 33 pounds of sugar a year. Sugar overloads kids with calories that can contribute to weight gain. Sugar also fuels cavity-causing bacteria in a child's mouth. These bacteria produce acids that attack and decay teeth. The thin enamel of baby teeth is especially vulnerable to this disease process.

The damage that sugary drinks can cause to children's oral and overall health is harmful enough that the medical community has taken action. In May 2017, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released new recommendations that call for less fruit juice for children of all ages, including avoiding it entirely for infants less than one year of age.

Oral health is critically important. The mouth can serve as an early-warning detection system for more than 120 diseases. Plus, in children, cavities can spread from baby teeth to adult teeth, potentially creating a lifetime of oral health problems. This is one reason why healthy baby teeth are so important. Children from Hispanic, Black and lower-income families are less likely to receive dental treatment, making them more prone to cavities.²

¹ For the purpose of this toothkit, "sugary drinks" and "sugary beverages" include sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and sugar-containing beverages (SCBs).

² http://www.aapd.org/assets/1/7/State_of_Little_Teeth_Final.pdf

In many cases, untreated tooth decay can end up being painful, affecting other areas of a child's life, including missing days of school, or even more serious, dental-related illnesses.



Children with toothaches are **four times more likely to have a lower GPA.**³

Sugary beverages, like juice, are also loaded with low-nutrition calories that often don't fill kids up. In turn, children may eat more, which can lead to obesity and the serious health problems that come with it.

Fortunately, there is a protector against tooth decay, and it pours fresh, clean and clear. Drinking water can help wash away the sugar in children's mouths before it has a chance to harm their teeth. Water, especially when it's from the tap and has fluoride, is great for strengthening the thin enamel on baby teeth and fighting decay. Making sure that kids drink plenty of water throughout the day can help sustain oral and overall health.



For every 100 low-income kids, **58 hours of school are missed** due to dental disease.³

A growing number of families in Colorado are adopting healthier practices. There is also a role that communities must play in places where residents gather, including:

- Schools.
- Recreation centers.
- Youth sports leagues.
- Centers of worship.
- Child care centers.
- Museums and cultural institutions.



Parents miss an **average of 2.5 days of work every year** because their kids have dental pain, oftentimes leading to a loss of income.³

That's why many community organizations and Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation came together to create this toothkit. Using lessons learned from outreach in southwest Denver and southeastern Colorado, this toothkit provides simple tips for mobilizing community members and local leaders to help children grow up healthy. It has different sections for easy access to the content most applicable to your local effort.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3482021/>