



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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PRESS RELEASE

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IMPOSE LEVY ON SUGAR-SWEETENED SOFT DRINKS

The prevalence of diabetes in Malaysia among adults has tripled over the last 25 years, from 6.3% in 1986 to 20.8% in 2011. In 2015 the prevalence of diabetes in Malaysia was higher than the world average with 3.3 million people with diabetes and the cost of treatment hitting an enormous 7 billion ringgit.

Malaysia is one of the highest consumers of sugar worldwide. According to data from FAO-OECD, per capita consumption of sugar in the period 2012-2014 was 53.7 kg. This translates to approximately 29 teaspoons of sugar per person per day which is 4.8 times above the World Health Organisation's recommendation of 6 teaspoons of sugar per day. In real terms, this means that Malaysians must reduce their sugar intake by about 80% to stay healthy.

In view of this worrying trend and in commemorating World Health Day which falls on April 7, the Consumers Association of Penang calls on the Malaysian government to take the lead of the British Government to impose a levy on sugar-sweetened soft drinks.

The World Health Day is a global health awareness day celebrated every year on 7 April, under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO organizes international, regional and local events on the Day related to a particular theme. The theme for 2016 is Diabetes.

Soft drinks typically contain carbonated water, a sweetener and a natural or artificial flavouring. The sweetener may be sugar, high-fructose corn syrup or other sugar substitutes. Soft drinks may also contain caffeine, colourings, and preservatives.

The British Government in its recent budget on March 16 announced the introduction of a sugar tax on the soft drinks industry. Planned to come into effect in 2018, soft-drinks manufacturers will be taxed according to the volume of soft drinks they produce or import.

With this move Britain joins countries such as Mexico, Chile, Finland, France, and Hungary in the taxation of sugar-sweetened soft drinks as a deterrent to increasing consumption of such drinks which contribute to obesity and related diseases. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) has welcomed this move and encouraged more countries to follow suit.

According to IDF 'The global per capita sugar consumption has increased by over 50% over the past fifty years. The global prevalence of diabetes has also increased progressively over the past fifty years. Recent studies have demonstrated strong associations between consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and increased risk of type 2 diabetes and that per capita sugar consumption is independently associated with prevalence of diabetes.'

A recent report published in the medical journal, Lancet indicates that an evaluation of the tax on sugar-sweetened soft drinks in Mexico showed an average decline of 6% in purchases of taxed beverages in 2014. The reduction compared to pre-tax trends reached 12% by December 2014 indicating that the first year of this tax has led to the expected significant declines in purchases of sugar-sweetened soft drinks. Mexico's initiatives included a media campaign linking soft drinks to diabetes.

Recent studies also indicate that sugar is not just linked to obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay but also to heart disease and stroke. Given the overwhelming evidence suggesting that excessive intake of added sugars has adverse effects on diabetes and heart disease, CAP urges the Ministry of Health to spearhead policy actions to reduce the consumption of added sugars in the interest of public health. Some of these actions include:

- Impose taxes on sugar-sweetened soft drinks
- Launch effective educational campaign linking sugar to diabetes and heart disease
- Ban sale of sugar-sweetened beverages in schools or vicinity of schools
- Ban vending machines which dispense high-sugar drinks.
- Make clean drinking water freely available in all schools, places of employment and in public open spaces.

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