

## Energy Drinks: A Legal, But Dangerous, Beverage? .....By Lisa S. Garbaty

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Energy drinks - so accessible to children and adolescents at our local grocery and convenience stores – it's easy to think that they are harmless.

However, in one American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report<sup>1</sup>, after a review of the potential health risks posed by energy drinks, pediatricians were encouraged to understand that they were not appropriate for consumption by either children or adolescents.

Why? One reason is the high content of stimulants, particularly caffeine, in many of these drinks. In the report, "Health Effects of Energy Drinks on Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults"<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter, the "Health Effects of Energy Drinks"), it was noted that, although healthy people are able to tolerate caffeine in moderation, heavy caffeine consumption, such as drinking energy drinks, has been associated with serious consequences including: seizures, mania, stroke, and sudden death. Children, especially those who have certain health issues (including, but not limited to, seizures, diabetes, mood disorders, or cardiovascular, renal or liver diseases) may be at higher risk for health problems from energy drink consumption.

According to "Sports Drinks and Energy Drinks for Children and Adolescents: Are They Appropriate?", the total amount of caffeine contained in a single can or bottle of some energy drinks can exceed 500 mg – the equivalent of drinking 14 cans of caffeinated soft drinks; this is enough to result in caffeine toxicity. Be aware that the amount of caffeine in these drinks may exceed even the amount listed on their labels. Although the Food and Drug Administration imposes a limit of 71 mg of caffeine per 12 ounces of soda, energy-drink manufacturers may circumvent this limit by claiming that their drinks are natural dietary supplements.<sup>3</sup> Listed separately may be other

stimulants, including guarana – a substance which may contain an additional 40 mg to 80 mg of caffeine per gram.<sup>4</sup>

How widespread is their use? According to the information cited in the Health Effects of Energy Drinks, these beverages are consumed by 30%-50% of adolescents and young adults!<sup>5</sup> Of the 5,448 U.S. caffeine overdoses reported in 2007, 46% occurred in those younger than 19 years old.<sup>6</sup> According to recent news reports, the FDA is investigating whether certain reported deaths are a result drinking a particular energy drink.<sup>7</sup> One U.S. Senator from Illinois has requested that the FDA investigate energy drinks, and to enforce its regulatory authority over the caffeine levels in such drinks, as well as to address the safety concerns posed by additives in those drinks.<sup>8</sup>

What can we do to protect our children?

- Talk to your family about the concerns surrounding these drinks.
- Set aside time at your next PTA meeting to discuss this issue.
- Distribute information concerning the information contained in this article, including the related sources provided, to your members.

Do you think this issue would be a good topic for an Illinois PTA Resolution? What are the issues impacting our youth that concern you? Are they statewide in scope? Check the [Call for Resolutions](#) booklet found in your local unit packet, and at [www.illinoispta.org](http://www.illinoispta.org). The deadline is January 3, 2013 for submission of Resolutions to the Illinois PTA for consideration.

Questions? Send an email to [lgarbaty@illinoispta.org](mailto:lgarbaty@illinoispta.org). I would love to hear from you!

<sup>1</sup> Clinical Report – Sports Drinks and Energy Drinks for Children and Adolescents: Are They Appropriate? The full report may be found at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/127/6/1182.full.pdf+html>

<sup>2</sup> Health Effects of Energy Drinks on Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults, by Sara M. Seifert, Judith L. Schaechter, Eugene R. Hershorn and Steven E. Lipschultz. The full article may be found at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/02/14/peds.2009-3592.full.pdf+html>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> [Chicago Tribune](#), "U.S. Probes Deaths for Links to Monster Energy Drink". The full article may be found at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sns-rt-monster-lawsuit-update-4l1e8lmjpn-20121022,0,6038634,full.story>

<sup>8</sup>

<http://thehill.com/images/stories/blogs/flooraction/jan2012/durbinfd.a.pdf>