

# Energy Drink Manufacturers Under Fire For Health Risks

Lindsey Tanner, AP Medical Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Energy drinks are under-studied, overused and can be dangerous for children and teens, warns a report by doctors who say kids shouldn't use the popular products.

The potential harms, caused mostly by too much caffeine or similar ingredients, include heart palpitations, seizures, strokes and even sudden death, the authors write in the medical journal *Pediatrics*. They reviewed data from the government and interest groups, scientific literature, case reports and articles in popular and trade media.

Dakota Sailor, 18, a high school senior in Carl Junction, Mo., says risks linked with energy drinks aren't just hype.

Sailor had a seizure and was hospitalized for five days last year after drinking two large energy drinks — a brand he'd never tried before. He said his doctor thinks caffeine or caffeine-like ingredients may have been to blame.

The report says some cans have four to five times more caffeine than soda, and Sailor said some kids he knows "drink four or five of them a day. That's just dumb."

Sailor has sworn off the drinks and thinks other kids should, too.

The report's authors want pediatricians to routinely ask patients and their parents about energy drink use and to advise against drinking them.

"We would discourage the routine use" by children and teens, said Dr. Steven Lipshultz, pediatrics chairman at the University of Miami's medical school. He wrote the report with colleagues from that center.

The report says energy drinks often contain ingredients that can enhance the jittery effects of caffeine or that can have other side effects including nausea and diarrhea. It says they should be regulated as stringently as tobacco, alcohol and prescription medicines.

"For most children, adolescents, and young adults, safe levels of consumption have not been established," the report said.

Introduced more than 20 years ago, energy drinks are the fastest growing U.S. beverage market; 2011 sales are expected to top \$9 billion, the report said. It cites research suggesting that about one-third of teens and young adults regularly consume energy drinks. Yet research is lacking on risk from long-term use and

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effects in kids — especially those with medical conditions that may increase the dangers, the report said.

The report comes amid a crackdown on energy drinks containing alcohol and caffeine, including recent Food and Drug Administration warning letters to manufacturers and bans in several states because of alcohol overdoses.

The report focuses on nonalcoholic drinks but emphasizes that drinking them along with alcohol is dangerous.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers adopted codes late last year to start tracking energy drink overdoses and side effects nationwide; 677 cases occurred from October through December; so far, 331 have been reported this year.

Most 2011 cases involved children and teens. Of the more than 300 energy drink poisonings this year, a quarter of them involved kids younger than 6, according to a data chart from the poison control group.

That's a tiny fraction of the more than 2 million poisonings from other substances reported to the group each year. But the chart's list of reported energy drink-related symptoms is lengthy, including seizures, hallucinations, rapid heart rate, chest pain, high blood pressure and irritability, but no deaths.

Monday's paper doesn't quantify drink-related complications or deaths. It cites other reports on a few deaths in Europe of teens or young adults who mixed the drinks with alcohol, or who had conditions like epilepsy that may have increased the risks.

Maureen Storey, senior vice president of science policy at the American Beverage Association, an industry group, said the report "does nothing more than perpetuate misinformation" about energy drinks.

Many of the drinks contain much less caffeine than coffee from popular coffeehouses, and caffeine amounts are listed on many of the products, she said in a written statement.

Caffeine is safe, but those who are sensitive to it can check the labels, she said.

A clinical report on energy drinks is expected soon from the American Academy of Pediatrics that may include guidelines for doctors.

Dr. Marcie Schneider, an adolescent medicine specialist in Greenwich, Conn., and member of the academy's nutrition committee, praised Monday's report for raising awareness about the risks.

"These drinks have no benefit, no place in the diet of kids," Schneider said.

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