



Evidence Summary

Caffeinated energy drinks and children

Caffeinated energy drinks are popular among young people in the UK. Because we do not know how much caffeine is safe for children to drink, some people think the government should ban caffeinated energy drinks for people under age 18 years.

To help people think about these issues we gathered together evidence from across the UK. We looked at which groups of children use caffeinated energy drinks the most. We also looked at whether caffeinated energy drink use is related to children's health and wellbeing.

Children who use caffeinated energy drinks are more likely to be older rather than younger, to be boys rather than girls, and to be from the North of England rather than the South. People from poorer backgrounds are more likely to use caffeinated energy drinks than those who are richer.

Regular caffeinated energy drink users are more likely than children who use them less often to report problems with their physical health, mental health, and education. More information is needed to understand exactly how caffeinated energy drink use is related to these problems.

The Department of Health & Social Care Reviews Facility is a collaboration between the following centres of excellence:

This summary is based on a systematic review for the Department of Health and Social Care, England.

The aim was to understand which groups of children use caffeinated energy drinks and whether using them affects children's health and wellbeing.

Our evidence comes from five studies which asked children in different parts of the UK about these issues:

- **Smoking and Drinking Survey of Young People (England), 2014**
- **Health Behaviour in School Children (Wales), 2013/14 and 2017/18**
- **National Diet and Nutrition Survey (England), 2014 and 2016**
- **Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (Northern Ireland), 2016**
- **Millennium Cohort Study (UK), 2008**

This is a summary of the methods and findings of the review. A full report of the review can be found at: <http://bit.ly/cedreport>.

Background

Caffeinated energy drinks are popular among young people in the UK. Because we do not know how much caffeine is safe for children to drink, some people think the government should ban caffeinated energy drinks for people under age 18 years. In order to decide about this issue, the government needed to find out more about it. They asked us to find out which groups of young people use caffeinated energy drinks and whether caffeinated energy drinks affect children's physical and mental health, their behaviour or their education.

Findings

Which groups of children and young people use caffeinated energy drinks?

We found that children who use caffeinated energy drinks are more likely to be older (age 13-16 years) rather than younger (age 11-12 years), to be boys rather than girls, and to be from the North of England rather than the South.

Receiving free school meals was also related to caffeinated energy drink consumption. This suggests that poorer children may be more affected than others.

Is using caffeinated energy drinks related to children's health and wellbeing?

We found that regular drinkers, those who have one or more cans of caffeinated energy drink every week, are more likely to report health issues than those who drink them less often or not at all.

Regular drinkers are more likely to smoke or drink alcohol. They are also more likely to have physical health problems including sleep difficulties, headaches and stomach aches.

They are also more likely to experience mental health issues including low mental wellbeing, nervousness and irritability. Children who have caffeinated energy drinks every day are even more likely to report poor wellbeing than those who have them once a week.

Caffeinated energy drinks are also related to children's education. Children who have been excluded from school or truanted are more likely to be regular caffeinated energy drink users than those who have not been excluded or truanted. Our findings can help to inform the government, but they will also be useful for young people in the UK, parents, teachers and those providing health and social care services to young people.

What else do we need to know?

There were some things that the evidence we looked at could not answer.

Although we found that that caffeinated energy drink use is related to children's health and education problems, it is not yet clear whether or how caffeinated energy drinks cause these problems. Studies that look at caffeinated energy drink use over a longer period of time will help us to understand these issues better. Research which looks at the reasons why young people consume caffeinated energy drinks and their views about how it affects them may also help. Studies that look at the influences of poverty on caffeinated energy drink use and associated problems are also needed.

This report should be cited as:

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