

# Two-thirds of California Teens Drink Soda and Nearly Half Eat Fast Food Every Day

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A new report from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research shows that two-thirds of California teens (more than 2 million) drink soda every day, and that nearly half (more than 1.5 million) eat fast food daily. More than 300,000 teens eat fast food twice a day and nearly 90,000 eat fast food three or more times per day.

By comparison, fewer than 25 percent of California teens eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

Based on data from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey, the new study offers a rare look at the eating habits of the state's young people, and provides valuable information for those crafting new policies to provide a healthier future for this generation of Californians.

"One of our key findings is that students who have access to soda in vending machines at school drink 25 percent more soda than those that don't," said study co-author Susan H. Babey, a research scientist at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. "Informed policy can encourage young people to adopt healthier habits."

The report contains other startling facts about California teen nutrition:

- Teens drink 1.4 sodas per day on average.
- A third of teens drink two or more sodas every day.

- Latinos and blacks consume more soda and fast food than other ethnic groups.
- Soda consumption tends to increase as household income decreases.
- Soda consumption increases with fast-food consumption.
- The more fast food teens eat, the less likely they are to eat fruits and vegetables.

"Clearly, these findings show that these high-calorie, high-fat foods make up a large part of the typical California teen's diet, and this has real implications for the health policy community," said lead author Theresa A. Hastert, a research associate with the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

The report was funded by a grant from The California Endowment, which seeks to use findings from studies such as this to educate the public and policy-makers about what is driving the soaring rates of childhood obesity.

"These findings are startling and cause for grave concern," said Dr. Robert K. Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment. "Parents, school officials and policy-makers need to play a much more active role to educate California's teens about the dire health consequences of their poor food choices."

The 2003 California Health Interview Survey interviewed more than 42,000 households throughout the state.

Since it was first conducted in 2001, the survey has been an essential tool for policy-makers, researchers and health advocates at every level needing a detailed snapshot of the complex health needs of California's

diverse population. The survey is a collaborative project of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Health Services and the Public Health Institute.

"The California Health Interview Survey gives policy-makers and advocates definitive information about the diets of key California population groups such as teenagers, as well as other factors that are so essential in crafting health policy to make our communities healthier," said E. Richard Brown, director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and professor in the School of Public Health.

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research was established in 1994 and is one of the nation's leading health policy research centers. It also is the premier source of health policy information for California. The center is based in the UCLA School of Public Health and is affiliated with the UCLA School of Public Affairs.

Source: UCLA

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