

Connecticut proposes chocolate milk ban in schools -

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School children in Connecticut may soon be forced to go without their midday chocolate kick.

Connecticut lawmakers are awaiting Gov. Daniel Malloy's signature on a bill that would ban chocolate milk and some juices from school cafeterias in the state. If he signs it, Connecticut would be the first state in the country -- not just a single school district -- to ban chocolate milk in school cafeterias. The law would go into effect next September.

Politicians in the state faced pressure to pass school nutrition rules or risk forfeiting funds from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a federal policy that sets requirements for the United States Department of Agriculture's Nutrition Programs, which includes its school lunch program. However, the USDA points out that the Act does not ban individual food items. A USDA spokesperson told CBS News that it does require flavored milks to be non-fat.

Under the state proposal, schools in Connecticut would only be allowed to serve low-fat, unflavored milk and beverages without artificial sweeteners, added sodium or more than four grams of sugar per ounce.

Chocolate milk contains high fructose corn syrup and up to 200 milligrams of sodium, which means it won't make the cut.

Some child nutritionists think the proposed law will backfire and jeopardize the health of children in the state. Jill Castle, a registered dietician and nutritionist from New Canaan, Conn., told CBS affiliate WFSB that when chocolate milk is removed from the cafeteria the overall consumption of milk goes down.

"From a nutrient profile, you're getting calcium, vitamin D, potassium, phosphorous, protein, and other nutrients," said Castle.

But some food experts disagree. Marlene Schwartz, director of Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, says the ban means that the food industry will simply need to adjust.

"This isn't going to keep out flavored milk," Schwartz told the Hartford Courant. "All it's going to do it make sure the flavored milk that's in there is not going to have added salt."

Other cities and school districts have made efforts to enforce similar bans. In 2011, the Los Angeles school district banned flavored milk in an effort to fight childhood obesity.

A recent study published in the journal PLOS One examined the impact of removing chocolate milk from 11 Oregon elementary schools. The researchers found while the move did reduce children's salt and sugar intake, it also meant they received less calcium and protein in their lunches. Additionally, eliminating chocolate milk decreased total milk sales to schools by 10 percent.

Mary Manwarning, a mother in Rocky Hill, Conn., says she believes the ban would be a mistake.

"I know several kids who won't drink any milk if it's not chocolate," Manwarning told WFSB. "They're going to be pretty upset because most of the class drinks chocolate milk."

Her daughter Bethany, a fourth grader, has observed the problem firsthand. "With most milks, we only go through two bins, but for chocolate, we go through four bins," she said.

Serving Flavored Milk in Schools

Flavored milk in schools: Ban it or keep it?

Many school boards and PTAs are embroiled in discussions about whether to remove chocolate milk from cafeterias. On the surface, the argument against flavored milk is logical; in a time when about 20 percent of America's children and teenagers are obese, added sugar to anything is justifiably scrutinized.

But the allegation that flavored milk contributes to obesity is factually incorrect. The opposite is actually the case: milk drinkers, even those that consume flavored milk, tend to weigh less, not more. According to a study published in 2008 in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, kids who drank milk were less likely to be overweight. This finding holds true no matter which flavor of milk kids consumed.

No flavored milk, or no milk?

Schools that have removed flavored milk have seen a sharp decline in milk consumption, which is bad news for kids' nutrition since milk contains nine essential nutrients and three nutrients that American children tend to under-consume: calcium, potassium and vitamin D.

The Milk Processors Education Program conducted a nationwide study to determine the impact of dropping flavored milk from school cafeterias. The study included 58 school districts, four of which are in California. The participating schools had independently decided to stop serving flavored milk.

The study found that total milk consumption dropped an average of 35 percent when flavored milk was eliminated. Consumption dropped because fewer students were selecting milk and

more milk was thrown away. Schools saw a 23 percent drop in the amount of milk sold.

It was assumed that the removal of flavored milk would cause an initial decline in milk consumption followed by a fairly quick rise in plain milk consumption once students adapt. But the data tells a different story: two years after flavored milk was removed, consumption continued at the lower level.

Where's the calcium?

It's a little known fact that nine out of ten girls and seven out of ten boys currently do not get enough calcium in their diets. With life expectancy on the rise in the U.S., osteoporosis has become of greater concern among older Americans. Food decisions that kids make today, will impact their future health later in life. And we're seeing consequences of lower bone mineral density early in life, as well: children and adolescents today are more likely to break a bone than their parents were.

Some argue that the nutrients lost when kids stop drinking milk can be replaced by other food sources. But to replace all the nutrients from one serving of flavored milk, schools would need to provide two ounces of cheese, one medium egg, one cup of fortified orange juice and a half cantaloupe over the course of a week. That adds up to a lot of extra calories and cost!

Eliminating excess sugar from kids' diets is a worthwhile goal. The added sugar in flavored milk is miniscule (less than 3% of a kid's daily sugar intake). We need to place the focus on what makes the most difference to a child's overall health. Flavored milk offers a practical way of ensuring that kids get all the nutrients they need, even if it takes a few more grams of sugar to do it.

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