



# **Evaluation of the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage School Education Initiative SipSmart!**

Submitted to:

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# Executive Summary

The Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) School Education Project is part of the British Columbia (BC) Healthy Living Alliance's (BCHLA) efforts to help British Columbians make healthy food and beverage choices. The project was to do this by implementing a widespread initiative to inform children and their parents about proper beverage choices with the ultimate goal of decreasing children's intake of sugary drinks. The goals of the SSB project were to implement a learning module that would inform students in Grades 4, 5 and 6 and their teachers on the health risks associated with SSB consumption and proper beverage choices, again with the ultimate goal of reducing SSB consumption and achieving healthy weights for BC children. The project also called for the implementation of a SSB education module for long-term use by BC teachers.

The BC Pediatric Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon are the co-leaders for the SSB project. BCHLA provided a \$1.1 million grant to implement this project.

BCHLA and Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) entered into an agreement for MSFHR to facilitate the evaluation. Through a competitive process, MSFHR contracted the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to conduct the evaluation of this project and other BCHLA initiatives.

The project implemented a short-term school based prevention intervention in the 2008–09 school year. An informative, fun and interactive learning module called Sip Smart! was developed and delivered to over 230 classes of Grades 4 to 6. Sip Smart! provided students, teachers and parents with relevant information about healthy beverages. Both students and teachers liked the program. They especially liked the hands-on activities. There is evidence to suggest that Sip Smart! influenced students' awareness and knowledge of healthy drink options. Sip Smart! offered the following outcomes:

## **Mid-Program Effects (after two lessons or two hours)**

- Sip Smart! increased students' awareness of and knowledge that sugary drinks such as pop, fruity drinks, sports drinks and slurpees are unhealthy choices.
- Sip Smart! decreased students' preferences for pop, fruity drinks, sports drinks and slurpees.
- Sip Smart! appears to have had a small impact on the volume of pop consumed, but no substantial effect on the intake of other sugary drinks.
- Sip Smart! reduced sugar intake from daily beverages consumed by students, particularly in those students who consumed a large amount of sugar per day from their beverage intake.

## **Post-Program Effects (six months after the program)**

- The finding of increased awareness and knowledge about sugary drinks observed at the mid-program period persisted. This is likely the strongest outcome for Sip Smart!. The evidence suggests students in the program classes retained some, but not all, of their knowledge about healthy beverages they received from the

program — many more students in the program group knew fruity drinks and sports drinks are not healthy choices. However, there were still indications that this new knowledge diminished over time.

- The evaluation did not find any evidence to support the hypothesis that Sip Smart! had longer-term effects on students' consumption of sugary drinks.
- Many of the outcomes observed after two lessons were short-lived, with a few exceptions.

## **Summary**

The Sugar-Sweetened Beverage School Education Project elected to implement a short-term intervention modeled after the Childhood Obesity Prevention Project in Schools (CHOPPS), a British school-based childhood obesity prevention intervention designed to reduce the consumption of carbonated drinks (James et al, 2004). The program implemented, called Sip Smart!, successfully delivered its messages about sugary drinks. The evaluation of Sip Smart! represented a unique opportunity to learn about the implementation and outcomes of a large-scale educational intervention on the risks of SSBs to health in Canada. The findings will advance the growing research on what risks sugar-sweetened beverages might pose to health.

The short-term results from the evaluation of Sip Smart! are promising. Despite the fact the program was short (three hours of lessons over six to eight weeks), it nevertheless resulted in some immediate changes in awareness, knowledge and beverage consumption. Some outcomes were, however, short-lived and did not persist after the program ended. The effect observed on the reduction in sugar intake for the group of students who consumed a large amount of sugar from their daily beverage intake was notable.

SipSmart! raised students' awareness of and knowledge about the risks of SSBs, but it did not change their consumption of SSBs in the longer term. It is likely the program was too short to maintain the observed mid-program outcomes in the longer term. This result appears consistent with other findings. A Cochrane review of 22 studies (including 12 short-term projects) suggested that most of the interventions were too short in duration to be effective (Summerbell et al, 2005). If long-term outcomes are desired, the program should be designed to be longer, reinforced in later grades, or both. Other obesity prevention strategies can build on the evidence produced from this evaluation; further evaluation of these strategies will add to the current knowledge base on SSBs.