Kids more inclined to choose diet soda

By ACSH Staff — August 24, 2012

The link between soda and obesity has attracted a hailstorm of media attention recently, not least of which in New York City, where Mayor Bloomberg is attempting to restrict the sale of sweetened beverages exceeding 16 ounces. Yet, amidst the soda melee, it’s surprising how little attention diet soda has received. That is until a new study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* indicates [1] that the rate of diet soda consumption by children in the U.S. has more than doubled since 1999.

According to the study, only six percent of kids were gulping down diet drinks between 1999 and 2000. Yet that number jumped to 12.5 percent in 2007-2008 (the latest year for which figures are available). In comparison, about 25 percent of adults drink low- or no-calorie sweetened drinks.

These findings, then, warrant asking: Is this change beneficial for children’s health? According to some health officials, the answer is yes. As Matthew Gillman, director of the Obesity Prevention Program at Harvard Medical School, points out, This is probably a step in the right direction. Others also believe that replacing high-calorie drinks with low-calorie options can help teenagers control their weight as long as they don’t use diet drinks to rationalize over-consuming in other ways.

But despite these qualms, we find the increase in diet soda consumption among America’s youth encouraging. This is a good thing, says ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. While many in the anti-soda camp never mention diet soda, this report should help support low-calorie beverages as a valid aid toward calorie control there is nothing wrong with drinking calorie-free sodas.