



## Gov. Paterson hopes soda tax will tackle obesity

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by [Anna Sanders](#)

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Governor David Paterson's recent soda tax proposal was left out of the 2010-2011 executive budget plan. Now, Paterson is frantically working to get it back in.

The tax would be applied to drinks with added sugar, including soft drinks, sports drinks, iced tea and fruit and vegetable drinks that contain less than 70 percent natural juice. The proposed tax would generate an estimated \$465 million in state revenues.

Proponents of the bill said they hoped for similar results as the cigarette tax passed earlier this year.

"[The tax is] a good idea for trying to protect the public health, trying to fight obesity," New York State Health Department spokeswoman Claudia Hutton said. "We think, because of its public health benefit, and the fact that we might be able to help turn around obesity, over time, [it] makes it a better option than borrowing [and] a better option than doing more cuts."

Despite the opposition from both houses of the Legislature, the health department still backs the soda tax, Hutton said. The tax also received support from Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Yale University assistant professor of health policy Jason Fletcher is not convinced. Fletcher published a study in 2009 showing that states with a tax on soda did not have significantly lower obesity rates.

"We found no evidence of soda taxes decreasing weight because of the substitution to other beverages," he said. "We found reductions in soda consumption, but that children substitute for other high calorie beverages so that there is no change in weight,"

Niyati Parekh, NYU assistant professor of nutrition and public health, isn't convinced that a soda tax would make a difference.

"Other diet factors count so much that only taxing sodas is maybe a thought in the right direction," she said. "But it's really not going to decrease the rates in obesity as much as doing other interventions."

She said that lawmakers should be focusing on health education instead.

"The best comparison [to a soda tax] I have is taxes on cigarettes," Parekh said. "I'm not sure it really changed anything, it was much more the education and counseling and making sure people were aware that cigarette smoking is bad, rather than just taxing cigarettes that would change their behaviors."

She added, "I think nutrition education is going to play a much bigger role than taxation."