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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Study Exposes Beverage Industry's Misleading Health Claims "Health Halo" Around Popular Drinks Obscures Risks to Children**

Berkeley, CA, August 6, 2014... While sales of sodas are slipping, the huge category of alternative sugary beverages—that includes energy, sports, tea and fruit drinks—is growing rapidly and is perpetuated by misleading health claims, according to a study released today by the University of California, Berkeley.

Researchers at the Atkins Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley investigated the growing and often confusing list of supplements added to sugary drinks to determine their effects on their most common consumers--children and teens. The findings: In most cases, they provide little or no health benefits. In some cases the added ingredients may actually be dangerous, and in virtually all cases, manufacturers attempt to put a "health halo" over what is an otherwise unhealthy sugary beverage.

"Despite the positive connotation surrounding energy and sports drinks, these products are essentially sodas without the carbonation," says lead author Dr. Patricia Crawford. "Rather than *promote* health as claimed in advertising, these drinks are putting our children's health *at risk*."

Crawford's study takes the first comprehensive, scientific look at 21 popular sugary drinks touted by manufacturers as "health and strength enhancing" to understand their potential impact on young people who primarily consume them. Across the board, the significant sugar and calories they deliver are very troublesome, and the study draws special attention to the additives that are typically marketed as health and performance-enhancing: caffeine, non-caloric sweeteners, sodium, vitamins and minerals, and other supplements such as guarana, ginseng, taurine, ginkgo biloba and ginger extract. Of these five, Crawford cautions, only ginger extract is classified as "likely safe" for children by the National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. The health impact of the majority of added ingredients has not been studied in children; and some have known, harmful effects if consumed in high quantities by adults. Also of concern is the synergistic effect of these ingredients, in addition to the harmful amount of sugar they contain. Caffeine, for instance, when blended with guarana increases the physiological effects of the caffeine in the beverage.

Because caffeine is a mainstay of many of these products, marketers promote them as improving energy, concentration, endurance and performance. The study, however, documents that these beverages may have the opposite effect--increasing stress, nervousness, anxiety, headaches, insomnia, tremors, hallucinations and seizures, while reducing academic performance. In fact, over-

consumption of these products has led to caffeine intoxication in teens, and contributed to elevated blood pressure, cardiac arrhythmia and death.

“Under the guise of offering the public more choices, beverage manufacturers are using a ‘health halo’ to attract increasingly health-conscious consumers of all ages back to sugary drinks,” says Dr. Harold Goldstein of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA), which commissioned the study. “Their health marketing claims are the 21<sup>st</sup> Century equivalent of selling snake oil.”

In many cases, beverage manufacturers add ingredients that are popularly considered healthful, such as vitamins and minerals. However, they fail to inform consumers that these vitamins are best supplied through the average diet. As a result, the study says people may be consuming vitamins and minerals at higher levels than necessary, while also adding significant amounts of liquid sugar to their diet.

Recently, a 14-member, national expert panel convened by Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, published its *Recommendations for Healthier Beverages* report recommending that the healthiest beverage choices for children and adolescents are plain water, nonfat or low-fat milk and 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice in small quantities. Read the full report at <http://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/recommendations-for-healthier-beverages/>. Crawford concludes: “The marketing of fortified beverages as beneficial or health-enhancing is premature at best and deceptive at worst. The beverages discussed in this report contain ingredients that have not been shown to provide the benefits that are claimed for them, and many of which have not been proven safe for consumption by youth.”

For detailed information on the various beverages, their ingredients, health claims and scientific evidence, download the full report at [www.publichealthadvocacy.org/healthhalo.html](http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/healthhalo.html)

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The Dr. Robert C. and Veronica Atkins Center for Weight and Health (CWH) was founded in 1999 and is co-sponsored by the College of Natural Resources (CNR) and the School of Public Health at the University of California at Berkeley. The Center’s mission is to illuminate factors influencing U.S. trends in hunger and obesity, and to address factors that can impact chronic health conditions including diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

The California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization at the forefront of solving the obesity and diabetes epidemics by advocating for groundbreaking policies that build a healthier California.

Healthy Eating Research is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The program supports research on environmental and policy strategies with strong potential to promote healthy eating among children and adolescents to prevent childhood obesity, especially among lower-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity.