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PepsiCo to keep schools sugar-free

India Plan Being Worked Out As Co Vows To Stop Sugared Drink Sales In Schools Globally

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NEW DELHI

PEPSICO has started planning how to pull its sugared soft drinks out of all schools in India, in line with its commitment to stop sales of the products from primary and secondary schools globally by 2012.

The announcement on Tuesday by the world's second-largest soft drink maker has been welcomed by schools and health experts, who say it will help in the fight against childhood obesity, but en-

suring its implementation could prove to be a challenge.

Punita Lal, executive director (marketing) at PepsiCo India, told ET that the company is committed to adopting the new global policy and cited its 'Get Active' programme as another indicator of its obligation to promote students' health.

"We are in the process of working out its rollout in India," she said, referring to the new global policy.

PepsiCo's 'Get Active' programme includes expanding physical education and promoting nutri-

tion education along with portfolio transformation towards more nutritious products.

PepsiCo and rival Coca-Cola adopted guidelines to stop selling sugared beverages in US schools in 2006. Coca-Cola has said it won't sell sugared drinks in primary schools worldwide unless asked.

Coca-Cola does not sell sugary drinks in primary schools in India and it also does not directly market carbonated drinks in schools, a company official said.

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Bottlers must be convinced

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SALES of aerated soft drinks at schools in India account for less than 2% of the sales of cola makers.

PepsiCo in India will start sending letters to schools urging them not to sell full-calorie sweetened drinks, but that will only be part of what is required to implement the policy in letter and spirit. The bottlers for the company must also be convinced not to sell the products in schools. Moreover, while it may be easy to enforce the new policy in large schools in metropolitan centres, which in any case mostly avoid selling sugared soft drinks, smaller cities could pose a hurdle.

"There is no doubt that aerated sugary drinks contribute to childhood obesity. This is a good move by PepsiCo, but juices also contain sugar and their sales are not being stopped," said Suneet Khanna, a childhood obesity specialist.

Ameeta Wattal, principal of Springdales School

in Delhi, said her school stopped keeping sugared drinks at its canteen some five years ago.

"If a corporate decides to stop selling it is good move. But only if they do it with all seriousness," she observed.

In primary schools, PepsiCo said it will restrict its portfolio to water brand Aquafina and juices like Tropicana, which have no added sugar. In secondary schools, it will also sell low-calorie drinks like Diet Pepsi.

Sales of soft drinks in developed markets like the US have been falling, but they have growing at a fast clip in India for sugared drinks like Pepsi cola, orange drink Mirinda, lemon-based 7-Up and Mountain Dew as well as other beverages like Tropicana juices, nimbu pani Nimbooz and sports drink Gatorade. The India arm of PepsiCo has been topping beverage volume growth in Asia, Middle-East and Africa, growing volumes by 32% last year.