

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

You won't find any high-caffeine energy drinks for sale at Chase County Schools (CCS). But, that doesn't mean students aren't drinking them.

In June, the American Medical Association said it would support a ban on the marketing of energy drinks to children under 18, saying the beverages could cause heart problems and other health issues.

The policy was adopted in a vote at the group's annual meeting in Chicago.

"Energy drinks contain massive and excessive amounts of caffeine that may lead to a host of health problems in young people, including heart problems, and banning companies from marketing these products to adolescents is a common sense action that we can take to protect the health of American kids," Dr. Alexander Ding, an AMA board member, said in a statement.

The group noted that stimulant drinks have surged in popularity in recent years, especially among high school and college students.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last year said it was investigating reports of five deaths that may be associated with Monster Beverage Corp's top-selling energy drink, called Monster.

The drinks, with aggressive-sounding names like Monster, Red Bull, AMP and Full Throttle, are the fastest-growing types of soft drink in the United States. They are often associated with extreme sports, which makes them popular among young men.

The American Beverage Association said it was disappointed in the AMA resolution. It said most energy drinks contain about half the caffeine of a similar size cup of coffeehouse coffee.

According to the Journal of Analytical Toxicology, an eight-ounce cup of regular brewed coffee contains 95-115 mg of caffeine; a 12-ounce can of Coca-Cola contains 35 mg of caffeine; an 8.3-ounce can of Red Bull contains 80 mg of caffeine, as does an eight-ounce can of Rockstar.

A 16-ounce Starbucks Grande Mocha Frappuccino Whip contains 115 mg of caffeine, while an eight-ounce AdvoCare Spark sports energy drink contains 120 mg of caffeine.

CCS School Nurse Angie Paisley said the energy drink companies market their product to young athletes.

"They want the quick fix," she stated. "They look at it as a nutritional drink."

Paisley said youths don't look at the caffeine content on the label.

"The mega doses of caffeine give them energy, but it speeds up the heart so much. If the heart gets out of rhythm you can go into cardiac arrest," she said.

A better solution for a quick energy boost, Paisley noted, is to drink chocolate milk within 30 minutes of starting a workout. "That's the best refueler they can get," she stated.

Or, athletes can drink a lot of water, and an occasional Gatorade for more energy.

CCS Football Coach Dan Lenners said his athletes drink lots of water during summer practices. On hot days and two-a-day practices, a manager also mixes up Gatorade.

"We want to make sure they're rehydrated enough for the next day," Lenners said. He added that no energy drinks are given out by the school, but "I'm sure some do (use them) on their own."

Lenners said coaches take mini courses on rehydration during their recertification classes every year.

Gatorade, water and fruit juices, as well as milk, are sold at CCS.

