

Sugar warning ahead of Coke's festive tour

● Campaigners hit out over amputations in children

By JULIA HORTON

Health experts and campaigners have condemned Coca-Cola for launching the latest UK Christmas Coke Truck tour while children and adults suffer record levels of amputations due to consuming too much sugar.

As the world-famous soft drinks giant's annual "festive" campaign was due to start today in Glasgow, more than 40 public health directors, councillors and community groups criticised the promotion of sugary drinks to youngsters. Latest figures show that more people than ever are losing limbs due to conditions like diabetes, which are linked to poor diet.

In an open letter spearheaded by the Sugar Smart healthy eating campaign - run by chef Jamie Oliver and UK charity Sustain - they warned that Coca-Cola's tour of the truck featured in its popular Christ-



↑ Coca-Cola's Christmas Coke Truck tour was due to start today in Glasgow

PICTURE: IAN GEORGESON

mas advertisements brought "less than festive" consequences.

The letter, sent to Jon Woods, general manager of Coca-Cola Great Britain & Ireland, stated: "It is with huge concern

that we see Coca-Cola once again using the festive spirit of Christmas to promote sugary drinks to children and the general population. Childhood obesity figures continue to make for grim reading...

[and] this year was marked by a record high number of amputations - with more than 8,500 last year in England alone, mostly due to type 2 diabetes. This condition is closely linked with being over-

weight or obese and diets high in sugar can lead to being overweight or obese."

Quoting further statistics on the nearly one in five children who are overweight or obese when they start prima-

ry school, the authors urged Coca-Cola to "stop promoting sugary drinks" during this year's tour and instead distribute sugar-free drinks and water.

Linda de Caestecker, director of public health at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, was among the signatories. Urging Coca-Cola and other firms to "take responsibility" as "influential brands to support customers to make healthier choices," she warned that a small can of coke contained almost the maximum daily amount of sugar recommended for a young child.

Dietitian and leader of the Glasgow Sugar Smart group, Lizzie Panagiotidou, said the tour "counteracted" the hard work done in the most deprived areas of Glasgow to "improve the understanding of the negative effects of excessive sugar".

In Scotland, Diabetes Scotland recorded lower limb amputations roughly doubling from 950 in 2007 to 2055 last year, though there was a slight fall between 2016 and the previous three years.

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