

Alcohol Marketing and Youth



The Problem

Alcohol is the number one drug of choice among America's youth.¹ Greater exposure to alcohol advertising contributes to an increase in drinking and alcohol-related harm among underage youth.^{2,3,4,5} As alcohol marketing tactics increase in complexity and become more commonplace in everyday life,² they significantly influence youth and adult expectations and attitudes, creating an environment that promotes underage drinking.^{6,7}

Drinking is Harmful to Youth

- In 2011, 9.7 million young people age 12 to 20 reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days. About 6.1 million were binge drinkers (defined as consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least one day in the past month), and 1.7 million drank heavily (defined as binge drinking five+ days in a month).⁸
- Underage drinking is associated with academic failure, illicit drug use, tobacco use, risky sexual behavior, and a range of harmful physical effects from hangovers to alcohol poisoning.¹
- A stunning 25.9% of underage drinkers meet the clinical criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence, compared to 9.6% of adult drinkers.⁹
- Each year 4,300 people under age 21 die from alcohol-related injuries involving underage drinking.¹⁰
- Costs of underage drinking (including medical, loss of work, and quality of life costs) run as much as \$60 billion annually.¹¹

Advertising and Youth Drinking

- A 2006 study found that youth in markets with greater alcohol advertising expenditures drank more; each additional dollar spent on alcohol advertising raised the number of drinks consumed by 3%.¹²
- Youth are 96 times more likely to see an ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging underage drinking.¹³
- Youth exposed to high levels of alcohol advertising are 50% more likely to drink than children with low exposure to such marketing.¹⁴
- Kids who own a hat, poster or T-shirt promoting alcohol are nearly twice as likely to drink as kids who don't.¹⁴

Television Exposure

- Cable television airs 95% of all alcohol advertisements on national television networks.¹⁵
- From 2001 to 2006, ad placements for beer, spirits, and alcopops increased as adolescent viewership rose from 0 to 30%, suggesting that the underage viewership threshold of 30% adopted by industry has been ineffective in reducing adolescent exposure.¹⁵
- Between 2001 and 2009, the average youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television increased 71%.¹⁶
- Nearly half of youth exposure to TV alcohol ads in 2009 came from ads shown on youth-oriented programming (programs with disproportionately large audiences of 12 to 20-year olds).¹⁶

Magazine and Internet Exposure

- Alcohol advertising is more prevalent in magazines with a higher proportion of youth readers. While magazines with less than 15% youth readership had an average of 9 alcohol ads, magazines with more than 30% youth readership averaged 54 alcohol ads, a 600% increase.¹⁷
- A significant proportion of magazine advertisements viewed by youth contained messaging pertaining to risky and sexual connotations that violated industry self-regulatory standards. Ads with violations of industry guidelines were more likely to be found in magazines with higher youth readerships.¹⁸
- Fifty-five alcohol websites during the last six months of 2003 had almost 700,000 in-depth visits from underage youth, which accounted for 13.1% of all in-depth visits to those sites during the measurement period.¹⁹

Bottom Line

Youth are needlessly and disproportionately exposed to alcohol ads, and industry's self-regulatory guidelines do not shield youth from exposure to alcohol advertising. Restricting marketing content and volume are effective policy responses to mitigate alcohol-related harm.^{2, 3} These efforts enjoy strong public support; 75% of adults favor banning alcohol ads in youth-oriented media.²⁰

References

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