

Alcohol Marketing and Youth

Greater exposure to alcohol advertising contributes to an increase in drinking and alcohol-related harm among underage youth.^{1, 2, 3} As alcohol marketing tactics increase in complexity and frequency,³ they significantly influence youth expectations and attitudes, creating an environment that promotes underage drinking.⁴

Drinking is Harmful to Youth

- Alcohol is the number one drug of choice among America's youth.⁵
- In 2007, 10.7 million people age 12 to 20 (27.9 % of this age group) reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Approximately 7.2 million (18.6%) were binge drinkers, defined as consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.⁶
- Underage drinking is associated with academic failure, illicit drug use, tobacco use, and a range of harmful physical effects from hangovers to alcohol poisoning.⁵
- Among drinkers, the highest prevalence of alcohol dependence in the U.S. population is among 18-20 year-olds.⁵
- A stunning 25.9% of underage drinkers meet the clinical criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence, compared to 9.6% of adult drinkers.⁷
- Each year about 5,000 people under age 21 die from alcohol-related injuries involving underage drinking.⁵
- The total national cost of underage drinking was estimated at \$61.9 billion (direct plus indirect costs) in 2001.⁸

Advertisements and Youth Drinking

- 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%.⁹
- Youth are 96 times more likely to see an ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging underage drinking.¹⁰
- Sixth and seventh graders exposed to high levels of alcohol advertising are 50% more likely to drink than children with low exposure to such marketing.¹¹
- Kids who own a hat, poster or T-shirt promoting alcohol are nearly twice as likely to drink as kids who don't.¹¹

Television Exposure

- Television is the most heavily used form of media among adolescents.¹²
- Cable television airs 95% of all alcohol advertisements on national networks.¹³
- 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.¹³

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- Between 2001 and 2005, youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television increased by 41%. Alcohol ads within this period appeared every year on 13 or more of the 15 programs most popular with teens ages 12 to 17.¹⁴
- More than 40% of youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television came from ads placed on youth-oriented programming, that is, programs with disproportionately large audiences of 12-to-20-year-olds.¹⁵
- The alcohol industry spent more than \$28.4 million dollars on ads shown during the 15 most popular teenage television shows in 2003.¹⁰

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 contain an average of 9 alcohol ads, those with more than 30% youth readership average 54 alcohol ads, 600% higher.¹⁶
- In 2004, more than half of youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines came from 22 brands, all of which overexposed youth age 12 to 20 relative to adults age 21 and over.¹⁷
- A study of alcohol advertising in magazines from 1997 - 2001 found that the number of beer and distilled spirits ads tended to increase with an increased numbers of youth readers per magazine. For every 1 million underage readers ages 12-19 in a magazine, researchers found 1.6 times more beer advertisements and 1.3 times more distilled spirits advertisements.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: Despite industry claims to the contrary, youth are needlessly and disproportionately exposed to alcohol ads, which in turn increases the risk of underage drinking and related harm. Restricting marketing content and volume are effective policy responses to mitigate alcohol-related harm. Such efforts enjoy strong public support, with 75% of adults favoring a ban on alcohol ads in youth-oriented media.²⁰

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