



## HealthlineNews

# Study: Super Bowl Beer Ads Make Kids and Teens More Likely to Drink

Addiction specialists suggest talking to your children about the advertisements they see during the big game tonight.

Written by David Heitz | Published on February 1, 2015



A new study confirms what those who would like to ban alcohol advertising already know — it works, even on teenagers.

In research [published online in JAMA Pediatrics](#), pediatrician Dr. Susanne E. Tanski of the Geisel School of Medicine at the Children’s Hospital at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, and colleagues showed that teens receptive to alcohol ads on television were more likely to imbibe.

Surveys using images of alcohol ads were given to 2,541 teens and young adults between the ages of 15 and 23 in 2011 and 2013. Almost 1,600 completed follow-up surveys. Those under the legal drinking age of 21 were only slightly less likely to see alcohol ads on television than those in the 21 to 23 age group. One in four people older than 21 reported seeing these ads.

At follow-up, those who remembered seeing the ads and liking them were more likely to begin drinking or to become binge or “hazardous” drinkers if they had already begun drinking when they took the first survey. Among teens 15 to 17 in the study, 29 percent reported binge drinking (having six or more drinks in one sitting) and 17 percent reported hazardous drinking, meaning that they met or exceeded a threshold score for alcohol use.

They try to make the ads cutesy and fun to attract kids’ attention. - Dr. Damon Raskin, Cliffside Malibu Treatment Center

A representative of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States [told the Wall Street Journal](#) the study is heavily flawed. One third of the study participants did not complete follow-up surveys and the researchers used subjective measures of ad “receptivity.”

Since tonight is the Super Bowl, the undisputed Oscar night of alcohol ads and an iconic national event, parents may want to take advantage of the teaching moment.

“Marketing works or people wouldn’t be in this business,” said Dr. Damon Raskin, medical director of [Cliffside Malibu Treatment Center](#). “Use this as an opportunity to open communication lines with your kids. It’s about being subtle, but it’s also about planting a seed that you care.”

Raskin suggests you begin the conversation by asking your child why they think Budweiser is running a commercial about a [lost puppy](#) and his horse friend this year.

“They try to make the ads cutesy and fun to attract kids’ attention,” Raskin said.

## Alcohol Use Among Teens Declines Overall

Despite the ads, another recent study shows that alcohol use has declined overall among children. The Monitoring the Future Survey [released in December](#) by the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) showed a significant five-year drop in binge drinking by high school seniors. They defined binge drinking as five or more drinks in a row at least once in the two weeks preceding the survey.

The survey showed a decline in alcohol use among teenagers in 2014. All three grades examined — eighth, tenth, and twelfth — saw declining drinking rates. Taken together, the number of teens reporting any alcohol use in the 12 months before the survey was 41 percent, down 2 percent from 2013.

[Related News: Drop in Binge Drinking, but 'Extreme' Drinking Holds Steady »](#)

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), among high school students 35 percent drank some amount of alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey. One-fifth of high school students participated in binge drinking and 10 percent admitted to drinking and driving.



Kristine Hitchens, director of family services for [Father Martin’s Ashley](#) in Maryland, agrees that children should be encouraged to challenge the motives behind advertising.

“Parents are wise to take the opportunity to discuss alcohol and drug use, abuse, and dependency as the occasions to do so naturally occur,” she told Healthline. “For example, instead of just watching the television ad about beer, discuss the ad and the implied benefits of drinking. Then question those notions and the purpose of the advertisement.”

# Advertisements Paint False Portrait

Tammy Strickling, director of [Suncoast Rehabilitation Center](#) in Florida, told Healthline that ads make it look like alcohol allows people to fit in more easily. Fitting in is a huge concern for all school-aged children.

“Much of the advertising depicts alcohol being consumed in social settings with sun and water, sports, and interaction with the opposite sex,” she said. “These situations are ones that teens and young adults are potentially struggling with in terms of their own ability and confidence to be in and handle such situations and interactions.”

When kids are raised with education and understanding about these things, they know all about it before they hit a social situation where they might be confused or uninformed and buckle to peer pressure.

Tammy Strickling, Suncoast Rehabilitation Center

Raskin said that when a commercial of a rousing college frat party appears, explain to your child how alcohol hinders brain function and development. Not exactly a ticket to summa cum laude.

Above all, don't wait until your kids are teenagers to have a conversation about the realities of alcohol, Strickling said. By the time they hit their teen years it's already too late. They need to understand the dangers of alcohol and how to be firm in saying no before anyone ever offers it to them.

“When kids are raised with education and understanding about these things, they know all about it before they hit a social situation where they might be confused or uninformed and buckle to peer pressure,” Strickling said.

The most important thing for parents to remember tonight is to be a role model and not to overdo it. It's impossible to discuss the dangers of alcohol if you're three sheets to the wind.

## Study: Self-Regulation for Alcohol Ads Doesn't Work

In the JAMA Pediatrics study, the authors concluded that the system of self-regulation in alcohol advertising is not working.

“The alcohol industry claims that their advertising self-regulation program protects underage youths from seeing their ads,” Tanski said in a news release issued by Dartmouth-Hitchcock. “Our study indicates it does not.”

Michael Scippa, public affairs director for San Francisco-based [Alcohol Justice](#), told Healthline the entire process is broken. There's more enabling going on than regulating when it comes to alcohol advertising. Alcohol Justice is working to limit alcohol advertising in public spaces and especially in mediums targeting children.

Scippa said France outlawed alcohol sponsorship of sporting and cultural events in the early 1990s. He said the law passed legal challenge in that country. “What they came up with in the court ruling was a statement that said it's an undeniable fact that alcohol advertising encourages consumption. The French rules are appropriate,” he said.

For their part, breweries such as Anheuser-Busch offer their own [tips for parents](#) to discuss underage drinking and make “responsible choices.”

Hitchens offers her own advice. “Parents should give clear and firm messages that they do not want their child drinking or using drugs,” she said.