

# Flavored alcoholic drinks linked to risky teen behaviors

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Flavored alcohol beverages appeal to underage youth because they taste more like sweet soda than other alcoholic drinks.

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Underage drinkers who consume supersized flavored alcoholic drinks – also known as [alcopops](#) – are more than six times as likely to report alcohol-related injuries as underage youth who consume other types of alcoholic beverages, according to a new study. The research, [published](#) in the Feb. 25 American Journal of Public Health, is the first to document the association between consumption of alcopops and risky drinking habits in teens.

Alcopops -- alcoholic beverages blended with fruit juice, lemonade or other flavorings -- appeal to underage drinkers because they taste more like sweet soda than other alcoholic drinks. These brews are typically 8 percent alcohol content by volume compared to less than 5 percent for beer.

Flavored alcoholic drinks come in malt-based beverages; spirits-based premixed, ready-to-drink cocktails; and supersized alcopops. Previous studies found that half of underage drinkers in the U.S. said they had consumed flavored alcohol beverages in the past 30 days.

“It is impossible to discuss harmful alcohol consumption among youth and not include supersized alcopops,” study co-author David Jernigan, PhD, director of the Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said in a [news release](#). “These low-priced and sweet-tasting beverages are associated with reports of dangerous consequences among youth.”

For their study, the researchers surveyed 1,031 underage youth ages 13 to 20 who had consumed at least one alcoholic drink during the past 30 days between December 2011 and May 2012. Using an online, self-reporting survey, respondents indicated which brands they had consumed in the past 30 days, and the typical number of drinks of each brand they had consumed on those days.

Survey results showed that [heavy episodic drinking](#) was reported by nearly 70 percent of the pre-mixed/ready-to-drink cocktail users. About 75 percent of supersized alcopop users and almost 80 percent of those who consumed more than one type of flavored alcoholic beverage engaged in the same drinking behaviors. Among the non-alcopop group, 45 percent reported heavy episodic drinking. Consumption of more than one type of alcopop was strongly associated with fighting and alcohol-related injuries.

In recent years, public health advocates have expressed concerns about the alcopops and their appeal to youth. Flavored alcoholic drinks, concluded the authors, “present an emerging public health problem among young people.”

“Public health practitioners and policy makers would be wise to consider what further steps could be taken to keep these beverages out of the hands of youth,” study author Alison Albers, PhD, an assistant professor at the Boston University School of Public Health, said in the news release.