

New guidelines could help alcohol industry reduce youth ad exposure

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U.S. youth would see fewer alcohol TV ads if the alcohol industry followed a new set of rules policing where they air, a recent study found.

A “no-buy” list of TV networks and programs the alcohol industry should avoid when buying ad airtime would reduce the number of times youth saw the ads on TV, according to a study published online Jan. 12 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

Created by researchers from the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth and Boston University School of Public Health’s Epidemiology Department, the list was based on networks and programs that, over a seven-year period, aired ads during times youth were likely to be watching. Based on the criteria, examples of networks that aired non-compliant ads during their programs include FX and Comedy Central.

“There’s been a fair amount of study now about the impact of alcohol advertising on underage drinking,” said Craig Ross, PhD, MBA, lead study author and consultant to the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. “From a public health perspective, alcohol is the No. 1 risk factor for death and disability for young people around the world and its use is associated with sexual assault, death, suicide and unintended pregnancy.”

The study looked at more than 2.4 million alcohol product ads that aired between 2005 and 2012. Between January 2005 and September 2011, ads were considered non-compliant if they aired during programs where more than 30 percent of the viewers were younger than age 21 — an alcohol industry standard. The standard was revised to 28.4 percent of viewers after September 2011, the study said.

Of 131.5 billion alcohol ad exposures for youth ages 2 to 20 during the seven-year period, 11.6 percent were non-compliant. From those 15.2 billion non-compliant exposures, nearly 95 percent were generated by 118,000 non-compliant ads on cable TV. And nearly all views of non-compliant ads happened when ads were on programs that attracted younger audiences in the past or on certain networks during times of the day when more youth would be watching.

U.S. youth could have avoided as many as 14 billion views of alcohol TV ads in those seven years if the alcohol industry had researchers' no-buy list, the study said. Study authors recommend using the no-buy list in future research about youth exposure to alcohol ads.

“Two out of every three ads had been placed on programs that had been non-compliant in the past,” Ross told *The Nation's Health*. “It's not rocket science. This seems to be the best approach, to come up with a strategy that works within the existing alcohol industry self regulatory advertising environment, and shouldn't put a burden on the industry.”

For more information, visit www.jsad.com/doi/abs/10.15288/jsad.2016.77.7.