

Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising on Television, 2001 to 2007

Executive Summary

Youth¹ exposure to alcohol advertising on television has risen by 38% since the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth began monitoring this exposure in 2001. From 2001 to 2007, the number of alcohol advertisements seen in a year by the average television-watching 12-to-20-year-old increased from 216 to 301. In 2007, approximately one out of every five alcohol advertisements was placed on programming that youth ages 12 to 20 were more likely per capita to see than adults of the legal drinking age.² Almost all of these placements were on cable television, where distilled spirits companies in particular have dramatically increased their alcohol advertising in the past seven years.

Researchers from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University (CAMY) and Virtual Media Resources of Natick, Massachusetts (VMR) analyzed the placements of 2,033,931 alcohol product advertisements that aired on television between 2001 and 2007, placed at a cost of \$6.6 billion. Key findings include:

- In 2007, 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.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of these overexposing ad placements in 2007 were on cable television, which generated 95% of youth overexposure to alcohol advertising on television.
- Of the youth overexposure on cable in 2007, 53% came from beer advertising, and 41% came from distilled spirits advertising.
- In a comparison of individual brands on the basis of their abilities to comply with industry voluntary codes on advertising placement and to avoid youth overexposure in 2007, 10 brands stood out, accounting for 41% of youth overexposure and 52% of advertisements placed above the industry's voluntary standard of a 30% maximum for youth in its audiences.
- Between 2001 and 2007, alcohol companies aired 73,565 “responsibility” advertisements on television. Youth ages 12 to 20 were 22 times more likely to see an alcohol product advertisement than an alcohol-industry-funded “responsibility” advertisement.

Why the Concern

Alcohol is the leading drug problem among young people,³ and underage drinking is responsible for approximately 5,000 deaths per year among persons under age 21.⁴

Young people who start drinking before age 15 are five times more likely than those who wait to drink until age 21 to have alcohol problems later in life, including alcohol dependence and involvement in alcohol-related violence and motor vehicle crashes.⁵

Evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing increases the likelihood of underage drinking has grown substantially. Since 2001, at least seven peer-reviewed longitudinal studies have found that young people with greater exposure to alcohol marketing are more likely to start drinking than their peers.⁶

In 2003, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine recommended that alcohol companies move toward a proportional 15% maximum for youth (ages 12 to 20) in audiences of their advertising.⁷ In 2006, 20 state attorneys general echoed that call,⁸ followed by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2007.⁹ Earlier CAMY research has estimated that if alcohol companies adopted this standard, they would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television by 20% and decrease their advertising costs by 8%, while maintaining virtually all of their ability to reach 21-to-34- or 21-to-24-year-olds, groups sometimes mentioned as the industry's target audiences for its advertising.¹⁰

¹For the purposes of this report, “youth” are persons ages 12 to 20, “underage” refers to persons ages two to 20, and “adults” are persons age 21 and above.

²Underage youth are more likely to see on a per capita basis, or be “overexposed” to, a televised ad for alcohol when it is placed on a program where the percentage of underage youth in the audience is greater than the percentage of underage youth in the general population. “More likely to see” or “more popular among” (as well as percentage measures of youth overexposure and other comparisons of adult and youth exposure to alcohol advertising in this report) is based on “gross rating points,” an industry-standard measure of how much an audience segment is exposed to advertising per capita. Another way of measuring advertising exposure is “gross impressions” (the total number of times all members of a given audience are exposed to advertising). The adult population will almost always receive far more gross impressions than youth because there are far more adults in the population than youth. Gross rating points are calculated by dividing gross impressions by the relevant population (e.g., persons age 21 and over) and multiplying by 100, thereby leveling the measurement playing field for differently sized population segments. See Appendix B for a glossary of terms used in this report.

³L.D. Johnston, P.M. O'Malley, J.G. Bachman and J.E. Schulenberg, Overall, illicit drug use by American teens continues gradual decline in 2007 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan News and Information Services, December 11, 2007), table 3. Available at <http://www.monitoring-thefuture.org/data/07data/pr07t3.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2007).

⁴U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007), p. 10.

⁵U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking: About the Call to Action*. Available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/about.html>, (accessed May 22, 2008).

⁶L. Snyder, F. Milici, M. Slater, H. Sun, Y. Strizhakova, "Effects of Alcohol Advertising Exposure on Drinking Among Youth," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 160, no. 1 (2006): 18–24; A.W. Stacy, J.B. Zogg, J.B. Unger, C.W. Dent, "Exposure to Televised Alcohol Ads and Subsequent Adolescent Alcohol Use," *American Journal of Health Behavior* 28, no. 6 (2004): 498–509; R.L. Collins, P.L. Ellickson, D. McCaffrey, K. Hambarsoomians, "Early Adolescent Exposure to Alcohol Advertising and its Relationship to Underage Drinking," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 40, no. 6 (2007): 527–534; K.E. Pasch, K.A. Komro, C.L. Perry, M.O. Hearst, K. Farbaksh, "Outdoor Alcohol Advertising Near Schools: What Does It Advertise and How Is It Related to Intentions and Use of Alcohol Among Young Adolescents?," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 68, no.4 (2007): 587–596; A.C. McClure, S. Dal Cin, J. Gibson, J.D. Sargent, "Ownership of Alcohol-Branded Merchandise and Initiation of Teen Drinking," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30, no. 4 (2006): 277–283; J.D. Sargent, T.A. Wills, M. Stoolmiller, J. Gibson, F.X. Gibbons, "Alcohol Use in Motion Pictures and Its Relation with Early-onset Teen Drinking," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 67 (2006): 54–65; L. Henriksen, E.C. Feighery, N.C. Schleicher, S.P. Fortmann, "Receptivity to Alcohol Marketing Predicts Initiation of Alcohol Use," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 42 (2008): 28–35.

⁷National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, R.J. Bonnie, M.E. O'Connell, eds. (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), pp. 138–140.

⁸RE: Alcohol Reports, Paperwork Comment, FTC File No. P064505. A Communication from the Chief Legal Officers of the Following States: Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wyoming [California subsequently signed on], May 8, 2006. Available at <http://www.ftc.gov/os/comments/alcoholmanufacadstudy/522852-01287.pdf> (accessed December 6, 2006).

⁹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007), p. 44.

¹⁰D. Jernigan, J. Ostroff, C. Ross, "Alcohol Advertising and Youth: A Measured Approach," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 26 (2005): 312–325.