

YOUTH EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL ADVERTISING IN NATIONAL MAGAZINES, 2001-2008

Executive Summary

Because there is growing evidence that youth* exposure to alcohol advertising increases the likelihood and quantity of underage drinking,¹ reducing youth exposure is an important public health goal. Leading alcohol companies self-regulate their advertising practices, and in 2003 pledged to strengthen their standards from a maximum of 50 percent underage audience composition for publications in which they placed their advertising to a 30 percent maximum. Also in 2003, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine recommended that the industry move toward a 15 percent maximum youth audience for its advertising placements, based on the percentage of young people ages 12 to 20 in the general population.

This report seeks to answer four questions regarding alcohol advertising in magazines: Did alcohol companies meet their 30 percent standard? Did youth exposure† to alcohol advertising fall? Did the prevalence of youth exposure coming from overexposure (that is, the prevalence of advertising appearing in magazines where the percentage of youth in the readership exceeds their percentage in the general population) decline? What steps are needed to continue to reduce youth exposure and overexposure?

Key findings of the analysis include:

- From 2001 to 2008, youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines fell by 48 percent. Adult (age 21 and above) exposure declined by 29 percent and young adult (ages 21 to 34) dropped by 31 percent.
- Alcohol advertising placed in publications with under 21 audiences greater than 30 percent fell to almost nothing by 2008.
- The 30 percent standard affected placements in only nine of the 160 magazines in which alcohol companies placed their advertising between 2001 and 2008.
- Youth exposure in magazines with youth age 12-to-20 audience composition above 15 percent declined by 48.4 percent. However, the percentage of youth exposure coming from this advertising increased from 69 percent to 78 percent.
- Continued declines in youth overexposure will depend on the actions of a small number of brands: In 2008, 16 brands (5 percent of the total 325 advertising in magazines) accounted for 50 percent of youth exposure in magazines with youth compositions above 15 percent, and 40 brands (13 percent) were responsible for 80 percent of youth exposure in these magazines.

* In this report, unless otherwise noted, youth are defined as persons ages 12 to 20, and adults are defined as persons age 21 and over.

† Youth exposure and overexposure (as well as “more likely to be read by” and other comparisons of youth and adult exposure to alcohol advertising in this report) are based on “gross rating points,” which measure 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 population are exposed to advertising). Had exposure been measured by gross impressions alone, youth exposure would have fallen by 45 percent from 2001 to 2008, and adult exposure would have fallen by 21 percent. 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 ages 21 and over) and multiplying by 100, resulting in a more comparable per capita measurement. See Appendix B for a glossary of terms.

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Background

More young people in the U.S. drink alcohol every month than smoke cigarettes or use any illegal drug. In 2008, 10.1 million young people between the ages of 12 and 20 reported drinking in the past month, and 6.6 million reported binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks within two hours).² Alcohol use causes more than 4,600 deaths of persons under 21 each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.³ It is closely associated with the three leading causes of death among persons ages 12 to 20: unintentional injuries (including motor vehicle crashes), homicide and suicide.^{4,5} Binge-drinking high school students are more likely to report poor school performance, riding with a driver who had been drinking, being currently sexually active, smoking cigarettes or cigars, being a victim of dating violence, attempting suicide and using illicit drugs.⁶

A substantial body of federally funded and international research into the effects of alcohol advertising on young people's drinking has consistently shown that the more young people are exposed to alcohol advertising, the more likely they are to initiate drinking or to drink more heavily if they are already drinkers.¹ At least 13 studies have followed cohorts of young people over time, measuring their exposure to alcohol marketing and then studying their subsequent drinking behavior. These studies have found that exposure to television beer advertisements,⁷⁻⁹ alcohol ads in magazines,⁷⁻⁸ alcohol ads on billboards,^{8,10} in-store beer marketing displays,⁷ beer concessions at sporting events⁷ and alcohol use in movies¹¹ increased the likelihood of drinking among young people. Ownership of alcohol promotional items was also strongly associated with drinking initiation^{12,13}, while per capita spending on alcohol advertising in a young person's media market increased both the likelihood of drinking and the chances of young people drinking heavily well into their mid-20s.⁸

The principal way that young people are protected from exposure to alcohol advertising is through the alcohol industry's own self-regulatory standards. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 1999 recommended that alcohol companies tighten their voluntary standards from a 50 percent limit on underage audience composition in media where alcohol advertising was placed to a 30 percent limit. In 2000, the Wine Institute complied. In 2003, trade associations for the beer and distilled spirits industries announced that they would no longer advertise in media with greater than 30 percent underage audiences. Also in 2003, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine called on alcohol companies to move toward a 15 percent placement standard based on the proportion of the viewing, reading or listening audience between the ages of 12 and 20.¹⁴

In 2006, 20 state attorneys general asked the Federal Trade Commission to explore with the industry the reduction to a 15 percent standard from the industry's current standard barring advertising where persons under 21 represent more than 30 percent of the audience for advertising.¹⁵ In 2007, one company, Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Inc., moved to a 25 percent standard, combined with a 15 percent annual aggregate average by brand and by medium. CAMY has estimated that, if adopted by the entire industry, this standard would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television by 14 percent and in magazines by more than 10 percent.¹⁶

Advertising in media in which youth ages 12 to 20 make up more than 15 percent of the audience generally results in these youth being "overexposed," that is, they are receiving advertising exposure that is out of proportion with their presence in the population.[‡] Although the overwhelming majority of alcohol brands do not overexpose youth with their magazine advertising, overexposure continues to account for nearly three-quarters of total youth exposure. Thirteen percent of alcohol brands advertising in magazines cause 80 percent of the youth overexposure. The industry has made progress in reducing total youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines, but continued success will rely on changes in the advertising practices of specific alcohol brands.

‡ The proportion of youth ages 12 to 20 as a percentage of all persons age 12 and above varies from 15.10 percent to 15.75 percent over the 2001 to 2008 study period. In cases where a publication has a 12-to-20 audience composition greater than 15 percent but less than the 12-to-20 population composition for a given year, such as with *People* magazine in 2006 and 2008 (15.03 percent), alcohol ad placements in that magazine exceed 15 percent composition but do not overexpose youth ages 12 to 20 relative to adults ages 21 and above. This exception occurs with the following publications and years:

Year	Publication	Ads	12-20 % Comp	Universe % Comp
2003	Harpers Bazaar	2	15.10%	15.18%
2005	Blender	62	15.10%	15.36%
2006	People	15	15.03%	15.16%
2008	People	18	15.03%	15.14%
2008	OK! Magazine	27	15.11%	15.14%