Alcohol ads reaching too many young people in TV markets across the US

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In twenty-five of the largest television markets in the U.S., almost 1 in 4 alcohol advertisements on a sample of national TV programs most popular with youth exceeded the alcohol industry's voluntary standards, according to researchers from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The report, published in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, found that the percentage of alcohol advertisements that exceeded the industry standard for youth exposure on these programs was highest in Houston (31.5%), followed by Los Angeles (30%), Dallas (29.7%), Atlanta (27.6%) and Chicago (27.5%). If this advertising were eliminated and not replaced, the researchers estimate that total youth exposure to alcohol advertising on these programs could drop by as much as one-third.

"Underage drinking harms teens, their families and their communities," said CDC Director Tom Frieden, M.D. M.P.H. "Exposing teens to alcohol advertising undermines what parents and other concerned adults are doing to raise healthy kids."

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among young people, accounting for an estimated 4,700 deaths among underage youth in the U.S. each year. At least 14 long-term studies have shown that exposure to alcohol marketing increases the chances that underage youth will begin drinking¬¬—and drink more if they do¬¬¬—further increasing the risk of health problems such as car crashes, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy.

According to a voluntary standard adopted in 2003, alcohol companies agreed not to place any ads (0%) on television programs where greater than 30 percent of the audience was likely to be younger than 21. The new report marks the first time researchers have used local ratings data to assess youth exposure, and the findings reflect differences in the number of underage viewers and the television viewing practices of youths in these cities.

"This study indicates that the alcohol industry's self-regulation of alcohol advertising could be improved," said study author and CAMY Director David Jernigan, PhD. "The potential public health pay-off in terms of reduced risk of underage drinking and harms related to it could be quite substantial."

The researchers assessed alcohol ad placements in 2010 for the ten programs with the largest numbers of youth viewers within each of four program categories (network sports, network non-sports, cable sports, and cable non-sports). Neilsen data were then used to assess exposure to alcohol ads placed on nationally telecast programs among the Nielsen sample of households in the 25 media markers, which are among the largest in the U.S. and account for roughly half of the total U.S. population aged 12-20 years living in homes with televisions.

"Alcohol industry codes have so far not specified whether companies should use local or national ratings data when purchasing alcohol advertising," said Jernigan. "This study suggests that by using readily-available information on the make-up of local TV audiences, advertisers could help reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising."

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