

Younger teens more likely to use alcohol if they live near bottle shops

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Deakin University researchers have found higher rates of underage drinking among young people who live in areas with a high number of alcohol outlets.

The study of more than 10,000 Victorian secondary school students aged 12—17 years (conducted in 2009) showed that as the number of [alcohol](#) outlets increased near their school, the rate of alcohol use increased. The most vulnerable were [children](#) aged 12 and 14 years.

The University's Alfred Deakin Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Dr Bosco Rowland, said the study also showed that, in defiance of the [national health](#) guidelines, 61 per cent of secondary school students consumed alcohol in the 12 month period studied.

"We compared increases in different types of alcohol sales outlets, such as pubs, licensed clubs, takeaway liquor stores, and cafes/restaurants," Dr Rowland explained.

"Increases in adolescent consumption were found when increases in all types of outlets were modelled. However, the greatest increase in consumption was found when the number of takeaway alcohol outlets increased.

"This may be because takeaway alcohol outlets face heavy competition and may be more tempted to sell to underage youth.

"If this is the case then liquor licence regulations need to be better enforced. Managers of alcohol outlets also need to ensure that staff are aware of licensing regulations and are aware of the consequences of not abiding by the licensing regulations."

Dr Rowland said that living near lots of [alcohol outlets](#) may also lead youth to think alcohol use is normal and safe.

"Compounding this, many Australian parents provide alcohol to their children, either with a meal, or to take to parties," he said.

"Parents think this is a safer way of monitoring how much alcohol their children are consuming. However, this practice goes against the current scientifically developed drinking guidelines, produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2009)."

The NHMRC drinking guidelines recommend that children should refrain from drinking before the age of 18, as it decreases the risk that they will be dependent on alcohol in adulthood, binge drink later in life; it also increases the chances that children do better academically and developmentally.

"The most recent evidence indicates that [drinking alcohol](#) during adolescence impacts on brain development," Dr Rowland said.

"Drinking affects learning difficulties, motivation, and impulse control. There needs to be more publicity of the national recommendation that youth should wait till they're 18 before using alcohol. To help children to avoid alcohol before 18, parents should set a rule that they do will not provide or condone [alcohol consumption](#) before the age of 18."

Provided by Deakin University

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