



The more alcohol ads kids see, the more alcohol they consume

By [Kelly Wallace](#), CNN

Story highlights

- The more exposure to alcohol ads, the greater the amount of alcohol kids consumed, new study says
- Study: Middle schoolers see two to four alcohol ads each day

Kelly Wallace is CNN's digital correspondent and editor-at-large covering family, career and life. Read her [other columns](#) and follow her reports at [CNN Parents](#) and on Twitter [@kellywallacety](#).

(CNN)My girls, 8 and 10, really enjoy watching football, but I have to admit I cringe every time they see yet another beer commercial during a live game.

They already know the names of several beers, and we don't drink beer, and basically don't drink much at all. Do I need any more proof of the power of advertising?

Now, with the release of a study showing a direct correlation between a kid's exposure to alcohol advertising and how much of those alcohol brands they consume, I'm thinking it's time to start recording football games and watching them via our DVR so we can fast-forward through the commercials.

"For a long time, a lot of people said, 'Well advertising doesn't really make a difference,' " when it comes to the impact on underage drinking, said [Dr. Timothy Naimi](#), the lead researcher on the new study and an associate professor at Boston University's Schools of Medicine and Public Health.

Now, there is a good body of evidence showing that when kids are exposed to advertising for a particular brand, they're more likely to drink that brand, he said. What's been missing until now is an exploration of whether the alcohol ads don't just influence the brands underage drinkers tend to choose but how much they drink in total.

[Study: Kids who sip alcohol more likely to drink](#)

The new study, published in the [Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs](#), was based on a sample of more than 1,000 13- to 20-year-olds from across the country who said they had alcohol in the past month. Researchers then asked if they watched any of the 20 most popular non-sports television shows and how much they consumed of the 61 alcohol brands showcased in commercials during those shows.

What they found is those underage drinkers who didn't see any alcohol ads drank about 14 drinks per month. That number rose to 33 drinks per month for the young people who had seen what amounts to an average amount of alcohol advertising, said Naimi. Underage drinkers exposed to the greatest amount of alcohol ads drank 200-plus drinks in the past month, he said, though very few of those in the study drank that much.

After factoring out that kids who watch more television may be more likely to drink anyway, researchers concluded that the more exposure kids had to these alcohol ads, the greater the amount they consumed of those brands. These findings are even more significant when you consider [the findings of another study](#), which found that kids ages 11 to 14 typically see two to four alcohol ads per day.



[Drinking with your kid: Is it a recipe for disaster?](#)

"I think the message is that this adds to evidence that alcohol advertising matters in terms of youth drinking and it demonstrates good support for the idea that alcohol advertising is not only related to which brands kids might choose to drink but how much they choose to drink in total," said Naimi.

Parents the greatest influence on a child's drinking

Ralph Blackman is president and chief executive officer of [Responsibility.org](#), a not-for-profit organization funded by the country's biggest distillers. The organization is devoted to reducing drunken driving and underage drinking and promoting responsible drinking among people who are legally allowed to consume alcohol.

While Blackman said he and his team had not been able to review the findings of this newest study to determine their validity, he said parents -- more than advertising -- play the biggest role in determining a kid's decision to drink.

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Parents were found to wield 71 times more influence over their children's decision to drink versus advertising, according to the [2016 Roper Youth Report](#) (PDF).

A [recent national survey by Responsibility.org](#) also found that nearly two-thirds of 10- to 18-year-olds cite their parents as the leading influence in their decision whether to drink. Behind parents, the young people cited friends/peers (46%) and brothers/sisters and other family members (32%). Only 14% said advertising/media affects their decision whether to drink, Blackman said.

"While alcohol expenditures have increased, the truth of the matter is that the rate of underage drinking continues to decline," said Blackman. "According to the [2015 Monitoring the Future study](#), alcohol consumption continues to show significant decreases among the nation's eighth, 10th and 12th graders. For the three grades combined, the proportion of students reporting annual and past month alcohol consumption reached the lowest level since the study began."

A self-regulating industry

What I didn't realize is the alcohol industry pretty much regulates itself when it comes to alcohol advertising on television. Manufacturers have their own guidelines, such as limiting ads to programs that have a mostly adult audience, but alcohol companies don't always follow their own guidelines. (Have you watched a Super Bowl lately and noticed how many beer commercials air during that program, when the audience includes many children as well as adults?)

There is also apparently no penalty for violations of these guidelines, but researchers hope more attention to studies such as this one could increase the pressure for change.

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"I think one of the implications for the broader society is that currently our controls on television advertising for alcohol are minimal and they're self-regulatory, so I think we should definitely tighten up that some," Naimi said.

There is a message here for parents, too. First, realize the influence you have on your children's decision whether to drink, and have the conversation about drinking with them early on so the subject is not taboo. (Check out Responsibility.org's [#TalkEarly campaign](#) on how to have the talk with your kids.) Second, be mindful about how much time your kids are spending watching television and what they are watching.

"I think it's another good argument for limiting screen time, because alcohol advertising is pervasive even among shows that may be watched by a large number of underage youth," said Naimi.