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Minors see online alcohol ads, buy alcohol

By Meredith Cohn

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Alcohol is far too attractive and easy to obtain online for kids, says Dr. David Jernigan, director of [Johns Hopkins' Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth](#).

Jernigan wrote a commentary for the [Archive of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine](#) to accompany a new report from researchers at the University of North Carolina that documents how easy it is for underage drinkers to make purchases on the Internet.

While it's long been known kids could buy alcohol online, this is believed to be the first peer-reviewed study to look at age verification practices of online vendors. Underage purchases were successful in 45 of 100 attempts, researchers found.

"The fact that there are literally thousands of online outlets selling alcohol and that purchase attempts by underage persons are successful almost half of the time tells us how insufficient the protections are for our youth," said Jernigan, who had also recently published [his own study](#) showing how appealing online advertising had become to youth through use of games, cartoons and even racy photos.

Jernigan said alcohol is the number one drug of choice for those under 21 and causes 4,700 deaths annually.

In his commentary, he says his center's research showed that marketers are using sites like Facebook, where kids are overrepresented. The center's studies found 6.7 million people "like" the 10 leading alcohol brands they surveyed.

He said at least 14 studies have shown kids are more likely to drink when they are exposed to alcohol advertising.

"The bottom line is that alcohol regulation and enforcement are simply not keeping up with new technologies," wrote Jernigan. "Tighter controls on content and better technology to limit underage access are needed to reduce alcohol use among young people."

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