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VITAL SIGNS: PATTERNS; With More Ads, More Girls Drink

By JOHN O'NEIL
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In recent years, drinking has become more common among teenage girls than boys, federal surveys have found. A study released today suggests one possible explanation: an increase in alcohol advertising reaching teenage girls.

The study, published in The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, said drinking by all teenagers had increased in recent years. Twice as many students under 18 said they had tried alcohol in 1999 than in 1995, and more girls than boys said in 2002 that they had been drinking at least once in the prior month.

The study cited industry statements showing that alcohol advertising had increased steadily in the same period, especially for low-alcohol drinks like wine coolers and alcoholic iced teas.

To determine how much of such advertising teenagers were being exposed to, the researchers, led by Dr. David H. Jernigan of Georgetown University, analyzed the ads placed in 103 national magazines in 2001 and 2002. They compared the magazines' estimates of the number of readers in different age categories with the population as a whole in those age groups.

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What they found, Dr. Jernigan said, is that a larger percentage of girls from age 12 to 20 were exposed to alcohol ads than were women over 21, or even women 21 to 34, the age group usually described as the prime target of alcohol marketing.

The biggest change from 2001 to 2002 came in ads for the low-alcohol drinks, the article said; girls' exposure to such ads jumped 216 percent, while boys' exposure went up 46 percent.

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