

# STILL GROWING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS: YOUTH EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL ADVERTISING ON TELEVISION, 2001–2005

## Executive Summary

In the wake of an historic increase in distilled spirits advertising on television since 2001, underage youth<sup>1</sup> exposure to alcohol advertising on television has grown substantially over the past five years, despite alcohol industry marketing reforms implemented in 2003.

The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University ([www.camy.org](http://www.camy.org)) has analyzed youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television from 2001 to 2005. Although a previous CAMY report has shown that youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines is declining,<sup>2</sup> the television data show that young people are seeing a growing number of alcohol ads, and that the industry's

voluntary 30% maximum underage audience composition for its advertising placements has not succeeded in protecting youth from the rising tide of alcohol advertising on television, particularly distilled spirits advertising on cable television.

From 2001 to 2005, alcohol companies spent \$4.7 billion to place 1.4 million advertisements for alcoholic beverages on television. Analysis of those advertisements shows that:

- Everyone is seeing more alcohol ads on television. In the wake of a 32% increase in spending on televised alcohol ads and a 34% increase in the number of alcohol ads on television from 2001 to 2005, youth (ages

12 to 20) exposure to those ads increased by 41%, young adult (ages 21 to 34) exposure increased by 39%, and adult (age 21+) exposure increased by 48%.

- Much of the growth of alcohol advertising on television is due to the rapid expansion of distilled spirits advertising on cable. Distilled spirits ads and spending on cable in 2005 were more than 23 times what they were in 2001. Spending grew from \$5 million to \$122 million, and the number of ads increased from 1,973 to 46,854. In the same period, beer spending on all television grew by 26%, and spending on alcopops<sup>3</sup> and wine declined.
- The number of alcohol ads placed on programming more likely to be

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, "underage youth" are persons ages 12 to 20, "underage" audiences refers to those ages 2 to 20 (television audiences are not measured below age 2) and "adults" are persons age 21 and above.

<sup>2</sup> Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, *Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising in Magazines, 2001 to 2004: Good News, Bad News* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> "Alcopops" are also referred to as "low-alcohol refreshers," "malternatives," "flavored malt beverages" or "ready-to-drink flavored alcoholic beverages." Many of the brands in this category, which includes brands such as Mike's Hard Lemonade and Smirnoff Ice, have alcohol contents of between 4% and 6%, similar to most traditional malt beverages. (Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau [TTB], "Notice No. 4—Flavored Malt Beverages and Related Proposals," Federal Register [March 24, 2003]: 14293.) The alcohol industry treats these as a distinct category of alcoholic beverages. This report follows this industry convention.

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seen by youth<sup>4</sup> ages 12 to 20 than adults age 21+ has trended downwards over the past five years, but remains above 2001 levels. As a percentage of alcohol product advertising on television, the number of such ads fell from 25% in 2001 to 20% in 2005.

- The number of alcohol ads placed on programming exceeding the industry's voluntary standard of 30% maximum underage audiences (measured on ages 2 to 20) has also trended downwards, and by 2005 was slightly below 2001 levels. As a percentage of alcohol ads on television, ads on programming with underage audiences above 30% fell from 11% in 2001 to 8% in 2005.
- Youth overexposure to alcohol advertising was most likely to occur on cable television: in 2001 60% of overexposure was on cable, while in 2005 93% of overexposure was on cable, a percentage far out of proportion to the 43% of alcohol advertising dollars spent on cable in 2005.

- On three cable networks—Comedy Central, VH1 and BET—youth were consistently overexposed to alcohol advertising every year from 2001 to 2005.
- In 2005, 12% of youth exposure to alcohol ads on television came from placements on programs with audiences under age 21 in excess of 30%. More than one-third of the total youth exposure came from placements on programming more likely to be viewed by youth than by adults.

## Why the Concern

There are nearly 11 million underage drinkers in the United States, and 7.2 million of them report binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks on a single occasion).<sup>5</sup> Alcohol is the number one drug problem among America's youth, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4,571 persons under age 21 died as a result of alcohol use in 2001, the last year for which data are available.<sup>6</sup> Alcohol use plays a substantial role in all three lead-

ing causes of death among youth—unintentional injuries (including motor vehicle fatalities and drowning), suicides and homicides.<sup>7</sup>

The earlier young people start to drink, the worse the consequences of drinking are likely to be: compared to those who wait until they are age 21, young people who start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent, seven times more likely to be involved in an alcohol-related motor vehicle crash, and at least ten times more likely to experience alcohol-related violence at some point in their lives.<sup>8</sup> Heavy use of alcohol during adolescence can impair the development of the brain, causing loss of memory and other skills.<sup>9</sup> Magnetic resonance imaging has also shown that teens with alcohol use disorders have greater activity in areas of the brain previously linked to reward, positive affect and episodic recall in response to alcoholic beverage advertisements, and that responses were highest in youth who consumed more drinks per month and reported greater desires to drink.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Underage youth are more likely to see on a per capita basis, or be "overexposed" to, a televised ad for alcohol when it is placed on a program where the percentage of underage youth in the audience is greater than the percentage of underage youth in the general population. "More likely to see" or "more popular among" (as well as percentage measures of youth overexposure and other comparisons of adult and youth exposure to alcohol advertising in this report) are based on "gross rating points," an industry-standard measure of how much an audience segment is exposed to advertising per capita. Another way of measuring advertising exposure is "gross impressions" (the total number of times all members of a given audience are exposed to advertising). The adult population will almost always receive far more gross impressions than youth because there are far more adults in the population than youth. Gross rating points are calculated by dividing gross impressions by the relevant population (e.g. persons age 21+) and multiplying by 100, thereby leveling the measurement playing field for differently-sized population segments. See Appendix B for a glossary of terms used in this report.

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings* (Rockville, Md.: Office of Applied Studies, 2006). Available at <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k5NSDUH/2k5results.htm#3.2> (accessed November 28, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Alcohol-Attributable Deaths Report, United States 2001, Medium & High Average Daily Alcohol Consumption, Youth <21 years due to Alcohol Exposure, by Cause and Gender" in the Alcohol-Related Disease Impact (ARDI) system. Available at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/ardi> (accessed November 28, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "10 Leading Causes of Death, United States: 2003, All Races, Both Sexes," in the WISQARS Leading Causes of Death Reports, 1999–2003. Available at <http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/lead-caus10.html> (accessed November 28, 2006); and National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 60–61.

<sup>8</sup> B. Grant, D. Dawson, "Age of Onset of Alcohol Use and Its Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey," *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9 (1997): 103–110; and R. Hingson, D. Kenkel, "Social, Health, and Economic Consequences of Underage Drinking," in *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, Background Papers [CD-ROM] (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 363.

<sup>9</sup> S.A. Brown, S.F. Tapert, "Health Consequences of Adolescent Alcohol Involvement," in *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, Background Papers [CD-ROM] (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 383–401.

<sup>10</sup> S.F. Tapert et al., "Neural Response to Alcohol Stimuli in Adolescents with Alcohol Use Disorder," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 60 (2003): 727–735.

A growing number of long-term studies has shown that the more alcohol advertising young people are exposed to, the

more likely they are to drink or drink more.<sup>11</sup> The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reviewed the alcohol industry's

efforts at self-regulation of its marketing practices in 1999 and 2003,<sup>12</sup> and will examine their efforts again in 2007.

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<sup>11</sup> See e.g., L.B. Snyder et al., "Effects of Alcohol Advertising Exposure on Drinking Among Youth," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 160 (2006):18-24; A.C. McClure et al., "Ownership of Alcohol-Branded Merchandise and Initiation of Teen Drinking," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30 (2006): 277-83; P.L. Ellickson et al., "Does alcohol advertising promote adolescent drinking? Results from a longitudinal assessment," *Addiction* 100 (2005): 235-246; J.D. Sargent et al., "Alcohol Use in Motion Pictures and Its Relation With Early-Onset Teen Drinking," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 67 (2006): 54-65; and A.W. Stacy et al., "Exposure to Televised Alcohol Ads and Subsequent Adolescent Alcohol Use," *American Journal of Health Behavior* 28 (2004): 498-509.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Trade Commission, *Self-regulation in the Alcohol Industry: A Review of Industry Efforts to Avoid Promoting Alcohol to Underage Consumers* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Trade Commission, 1999); and Federal Trade Commission, *Alcohol Marketing and Advertising: A Federal Trade Commission Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Trade Commission, 2003).

