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TEENAGE GIRLS TARGETED FOR SWEET-FLAVORED ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES
Polls show more teen girls see “alcopop” ads than women age 21-44

CHICAGO – The American Medical Association (AMA) released the results of two nationwide polls today that reveal the extent of underage consumption and marketing exposure to “alcopops” or so-called “girlie drinks.” The AMA expressed concern that hard-liquor brands are using these sweet-flavored malt beverages as “gateway” beverages to attract less-experienced drinkers.

“We’re alarmed and concerned with these findings,” said J. Edward Hill, president-elect of the AMA. “The percentage of girls who drink is on the rise faster than boys, and the average age of their first drink is now 13. These troubling trends make the aggressive marketing of so-called alcopops even more dangerous.”

The AMA said the poll results underscore the need for physicians to counsel young patients and parents of adolescent children on alcohol use, health risks and advocate for policies that protect underage youth from the marketing tactics of the alcohol industry. The polls were funded as part of the AMA’s partnership with The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

To assist physicians in their educational efforts, the AMA unveiled an informational poster for use in physicians’ offices. The *Girlie Drinks* poster is the first in a series of educational materials that are being developed for physicians’ offices that will help start a dialogue on this important health issue. The poster is available online at www.alcoholpolicymd.com.

“We urge physicians who care for young people to use these posters to help inform their patients,” Dr. Hill said. “Alcopops are marketed as fun, sexy and cool as if they are less risky to drink, but their health and safety consequences are anything but sexy or cool. The difference in female physiology means that teen girls feel greater impairment from alcohol and encounter alcohol-related problems faster, including brain damage, cancer, cardiac complications and other medical disorders.”

Key findings of the two polls released Thursday include:

- Approximately one-third of teen girls report having tried alcopops, and one out of six have done so in the past six months.
- More teen girls have had alcopops in the past six months than teen boys (31 percent versus 19 percent).
- Teen girls report drinking alcopops more than other alcoholic drinks, whereas adult women age 21 or older rank it as their least-consumed alcoholic beverage.
- For teens who have had alcoholic drinks in the past six months, girls drank more in all categories (beer, wine, alcopops and hard-liquor drinks) than boys.

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- Nearly one in six teen girls who have drunk alcopops in the past six months have been sexually active after drinking.
- One out of four teen girls who have tried alcopops have driven after drinking or ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking.
- One out of five teen girls who have tried alcopops have thrown up, or passed out, from drinking.
- Half (51 percent) of teen girls have seen alcopops ads.
- Nearly half of all girls aged 16-18 report seeing alcopops ads on TV, compared to only 34 percent of women 21 or older.
- Teen girls report seeing or hearing more alcopops ads on TV, radio, billboards, the Internet and in magazines more than women 21 or older

“While the alcohol industry claims to only target legal-age drinkers, their ads reach millions of impressionable young girls,” Dr. Hill said. “Previous studies and these new polls show that teenagers see such ads more so than their legal-age counterparts. Parents should be outraged that these products clearly target and reach underage girls.”

A study released earlier this year by the Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth revealed that girls ages 12-20 saw 95 percent more magazine ads for alcopops than women over 21. Women 21-34, the age group identified as the target audience for alcohol ads, were actually less exposed per capita to magazine advertising for alcopops and beer than girls aged 12-20.

The AMA polls reveal similar patterns, indicating that underage children see more alcopops ads. In addition, the polls provide insights into the resulting harms from alcopops consumption. The teen survey found that one in six girls who report trying alcopops were sexually active after drinking, and 25 percent drove a car after drinking or rode with a driver who had been.

The AMA said alcohol consumption contributes to numerous health problems that effect teenage girls as they develop, well into their later years. These include breast cancer, osteoporosis, menstrual disorders, brain function and heart disease. According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, women drinking at the same rate as men, continue to be at higher risk for certain serious medical consequences of alcohol use including liver, brain and heart damage.

The *Journal of Human Resources* reported in 2001 that teen girls who binge drink are 63 percent more likely to get pregnant in their teen years. And compared with non-drinkers, girls who drink suffer from higher rates of depression, suicidal thoughts and complications with puberty and menstruation.

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Editor’s Note: The AMA Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse directs two national programs, supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions and A Matter of Degree: The National Effort to Reduce High-Risk Drinking Among College Students.

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