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Cute packaging, fun flavors make 'alcopops' attractive to minors

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AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Cute packaging, fun flavors make 'alcopops' attractive to minors

They are fruity, fizzy and sugary-sweet. But sugar content is not your biggest worry with these beverages; they also contain alcohol.

"Alcopops" are fruit-flavored, malt-based drinks that come in brightly colored packaging attractive to minors. Popular alcopop brands include Smirnoff Ice, Mike's Hard Lemonade, Bacardi Breezer and Skyy Blue. Their strong, sweet flavorings conceal their alcoholic taste, making alcopops more palatable to new drinkers.

Half of teens between 17 and 18 years of age say they have tried alcopops, according to the American Medical Association. In addition, more than a quarter of 12th-graders surveyed in 2009 admitted to having tried alcopops in the last 30 days, reports the Monitoring the Future Study (sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse).

Many adolescents think that alcopops are safer than other alcoholic drinks; after all, the alcoholic industry calls them "low-alcohol refreshers." However, these drinks usually contain the same amount — or more — alcohol than many beers.

As with all alcoholic drinks, alcopops are dangerous for minors. New research shows that brain development continues into adolescence and young adulthood and that drinking alcohol can hinder this development. In addition, drinking in adolescence is linked to adulthood addiction. A recent study found that nine of 10 Americans who are addicted to alcohol began drinking before the age of 18.

Among people under 18, 30% say alcopops are their favorite alcoholic drink. The popularity of these drinks among



minors may be related to advertisement. Minors see 65% more alcopop magazine advertisements than do those who are over 21.

But advertisements aren't the only influence on adolescents; parents have power to pressure their teen out of drinking. To help teens develop responsible attitudes towards alcohol, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers the following advice to parents:

- Monitor your teen's use of alcohol.
- Lay down firm rules about drinking.
- Do not drink and drive yourself.
- Do not joke about alcohol use.
- Do not encourage your teen to drink with you.
- Show your teens that fun can be had without alcohol.

— Hilary Rasch

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