

MP calls for new measures to protect children from alcohol advertising

March 23 2011

Next week, Sarah Wollaston MP will put forward a private member's bill urging the government to adopt a new approach to protect UK children from alcohol advertising.

In an editorial published on bmj.com today, Professor Gerard Hastings and Dr Nick Sheron set out why we urgently need to tackle the excessive drinking of our [young people](#) and their massive exposure to [alcohol advertising](#).

The bill will call on the government to adapt French legislation that allows alcohol advertising in media aimed at adults but not children, and ensures that promotional messages are factual and verifiable.

The measure (called the "loi evin") was applied in France in 1991 to protect their children from alcohol marketing and has been a key plank in France's effort to reduce its alcohol problems. [Alcohol consumption](#) in France has been falling consistently since 1960.

In contrast, the UK has "clumsily imposed self regulatory codes" and now has one of the highest levels [binge drinking](#) and drunkenness among schoolchildren in Europe, say the authors.

In 2008, there were more than 600 alcohol-related deaths – almost two a day - among 15-24 year-olds in England and Wales and significantly more than the combined toll from cancer, heart disease, and respiratory disease in this age group.

Added to this are problems of anti-social behaviour, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Meanwhile, the UK drinks industry spends £800m a year promoting alcohol compared with a budget of just £2.6m for the UK's biggest alcohol education initiative in 2010. "For every £1 spent advising young people about the downsides of drinking, several hundred pounds are spent encouraging them to drink more," say the authors.

In the long term the bill will change drinking behaviour in young people, they write. Evidence clearly shows that alcohol promotion encourages [children](#) to drink at an earlier age and in greater quantities than they otherwise would. A recent study found that 96% of UK 13 year olds were aware of alcohol advertising.

"Removing this profoundly unhealthy influence is, unsurprisingly, recognised as a key public health priority," they conclude. "So, along with their café culture, the "loi evin" is a French innovation that the UK needs."

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: MP calls for new measures to protect children from alcohol advertising (2011, March 23) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-mp-children-alcohol-advertising.html>

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