

Teens prefer liquor to beer, hardly touch wine

March 8 2011, By Sylviane Duval



Nearly half of American teen drinkers would rather have a shot of liquor than a bottle of beer, a new study finds. The golden brew and malt beverages only come a distant second and third, and wine barely registers on the radar. Teens who prefer liquor are much more likely to indulge in high-risk behavior, like binge drinking, drinking and driving, smoking tobacco or marijuana and having multiple sexual partners, researchers also found.

The study, which covered 7,723 teens ages 12 to 18 in eight states, uses data from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Researchers found that boys were more likely to prefer liquor and beer than [girls](#), and that teens “graduate” to liquor and beer from malt beverages — such as Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Silver or Hard Lemonade — and [wine](#) coolers as they get

older. African-Americans and Hispanic teens preferred malt beverages to beer, but not to liquor.

“The number of liquor advertisements on TV has increased dramatically,” said lead study author, Michael Siegel, M.D., of the Boston University School of Public Health. “So it’s not surprising that liquor has become very popular among underage drinkers and surpasses beer as the alcoholic beverage of choice.”

The study appears online and in the April 2011 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Siegel said he does not believe that the type of alcohol teens consume affects their health directly. However, indirectly, the drinking patterns associated with the different types do have a strong influence.

“The study results suggest that youth might initiate drinking with sweeter, more-flavored alcoholic beverages like malt beverages and wine coolers, and that they progress toward harder alcoholic drinks, like beer and hard liquor — and the high-risk behavior,” he said.

“Any time MADD sees a study showing the prevalence of teen drinking, we are concerned about the health and safety of America’s youth and the harmful effects on their decision-making ability,” said Laura Dean-Mooney, national president of Mother Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The group reports that underage drinking kills 6,000 people in the United States each year.

A solution could lie in the way alcohol is marketed to teens. Wine, for instance, is not advertised heavily in teen-oriented media and does not appear to be part of their partying and drinking scene, all factors that might contribute to its lack of popularity. Siegel said that restricting advertising for malt beverages and wine coolers in youth-oriented media

could have a dramatic effect on overall youth drinking.

“The association between drinking hard [liquor](#) and increased risky behaviors is not surprising,” said Pat Paluzzi, head of the Healthy Teen Network. “It is often the same group of youth who engage in multiple risky behaviors, and this relationship is especially true for drinking and unsafe sexual practices. If this study leads to more effective prevention and intervention measures, the impact could go beyond what these authors note.”

More information: Siegel MD, et al. Alcoholic beverage preferences and associated drinking patterns and risk behaviors among high school youth. *Am J Prev Med* 40(4), 2011.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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