

# Online alcohol threat to Britain's youth revealed

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new report published last week, by independent auditors of underage sales Serve Legal and Plymouth University, warns that online alcohol sales and purchasing by friends and family are creating a significant and emerging battleground in the fight against underage drinking.

The [report](#) – Checked out: the role of ID checks in controlling [underage drinking](#) – indicates that high street [retailers](#) have become significantly better at checking the age of potential underage drinker in recent years. In 2007 the ID of teenage mystery shoppers attempting to buy alcohol from retailers or pubs was checked just over half of the time (55%). By 2010, ID was checked in more than seven in ten cases (71%).

However, the report warns that while greater vigilance by retailers has helped reduce alcohol consumption among young people, it has also prompted a shift in the way underage drinkers are getting hold of booze.

Online retailers are identified as a key potential source of alcohol for underage drinkers, presenting a window of opportunity for under-age drinkers looking to circumvent the stricter alcohol policies now in place in many high street retailers.

Researchers working on the Checked Out report uncovered a number of websites that sold alcohol where there was either no discernible age-check policy or a simple disclaimer noting that the consumer needed to be over 18 to complete the purchase.

Even major retailers, many of which have age-related policies in place regarding on-line alcohol purchases, mainly relied on an ID check at the point of delivery, placing delivery workers in potentially confrontational situations.

The report also identifies so-called ‘proxy-purchasing’ as a growing trend with 42% of underage drinkers claiming to have bought alcohol from friends, relatives or “someone else”. New Serve Legal data contained in the report found that while just 4% of underage consumers would try to buy alcohol at the till in a large supermarket, 74% would attempt to obtain alcohol from parents and 86% from older siblings or friends.

Ed Heaver, Director of Serve Legal who commissioned the report, said: “Retailers have woken up to the fact that they have to get tough when it comes to making sure employees are checking IDs. While this is good news in reducing underage [alcohol consumption](#), it is foolish to assume under-18s aren’t getting their hands on booze elsewhere.

“The battleground is changing in the fight against underage drinking – online retailers need to take heed of this warning and improve their age-checking procedures. Meanwhile parents and friends also need to understand the harm their proxy purchasing is doing.”

Dr Adrian Barton, of Plymouth University said: “Most underage drinkers realise that it’s now not that easy to walk into a shop to buy alcohol. This factor, added to more relaxed attitudes toward [alcohol](#) consumption by parents and relatives, added to the growth of the internet, is creating a perfect storm in the battle against underage drinking.

“The report should give plenty of food for thought for anyone involved in reducing underage drinking.”

**More information:** [www.servelegal.co.uk/download?id=20](http://www.servelegal.co.uk/download?id=20)

Provided by University of Plymouth

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