

Effective regulation of alcohol brand placements in movies could limit underage drinking

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Researchers at the Norris Cotton Cancer Center have found that current constraints on advertising for alcohol products in movies that adolescents watch are not effective. The study, "Trends in Tobacco and Alcohol Brand Placements in Popular US movies, 1996 through 2009," was published online in the May 27, 2013 *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Studies have shown that [movies](#) influence smoking and drinking during adolescence: A 2012 Surgeon General's report noted a [causal relationship](#) between the initiation of smoking in adolescents and depictions of smoking in movies, and there are studies showing that children's exposure to movie imagery of tobacco and alcohol is also associated with early onset of drinking and [alcohol abuse](#). A 1998 agreement, enforced by the State Attorneys General, resulted in dramatic declines in cigarette brand placements after 1999, and coincided with declines in youth tobacco use. However, paid brand placement in movies is still a common marketing practice for the [alcohol industry](#) and their rules don't adequately restrict placements to movies intended for adults.

"In order to be effective, constraints on advertising for products that harm adolescents should be externally developed and enforced," says Dr. James Sargent, co-director of the Cancer Control Research Program at Norris Cotton Cancer Center and professor of Pediatrics at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. "Historically, industry self-regulation in this area does not work."

This study examines recent trends for tobacco and alcohol use in movies before and after the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), which ended payments for tobacco brand placements in films. After the MSA was implemented tobacco brand placements in movies declined by 7 percent per year while alcohol brand placement, subject only to industry self-regulation, was found increasingly in movies rated for ages as young as 13.

The authors suggest that since evidence now supports the [negative health consequences](#) of smoking and drinking in films, the rating system should change. Movies that depict drinking in contexts that could increase curiosity or acceptability of unsafe drinking should be rated R. For example, no movie with a youth rating should show alcohol brands, underage drinking, binge drinking, alcohol abuse, or drinking and driving.

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