

# Low-priced alcopops pose high risk especially for youth, new study recommends regulation

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Dr. Matthew Rossheim. Credit: George Mason University.

Supersized alcopops are ready-to-drink flavored alcoholic beverages with high alcohol content. Drinking just one of the 23.5 oz. cans constitutes binge drinking. Drinking multiple cans can lead to alcohol poisoning and death. Four Loko is the leading brand of supersized alcopop consumed by underage drinkers. A new study led by George

Mason University's College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) found that Four Loko is among the cheapest ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages available in the United States. Due to the link between lower alcohol prices and higher consumption and related harms, particularly among youth, this is a public health concern.

CHHS Assistant Professor Dr. Matthew Rossheim led the study that examined Four Loko's retail price in large U.S. cities. CHHS students in the Department of Global and Community Health Kayla McDonald, Reema Ahmad, and Sieka Siklo were co-authors. The study was published in *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

These supersized alcopops are popular among underage youth, and a single 23.5 oz. can contains about three times the alcohol content of a regular beer. Moreover, they are sold in containers twice as large, so they have the alcohol content of a six-pack of beer and retail for less than \$3. According to the researchers, it is urgently important that the high alcohol-by-volume (abv) in these products be reduced, they are banned altogether, or their price is increased, so that [young people](#) can't obtain a lethal dose of sugar-sweetened alcohol for \$10.

"It is unsafe for anyone to consume a single can of Four Loko in one sitting, let alone minors who have less drinking experience and lower body weight," cautions Rossheim. "Regulatory agencies should reduce the availability and alcohol-by-volume of these products and increase their [retail price](#) in order to reduce and prevent unsafe alcohol consumption."

This study collected data from a random sample of stores in the largest city of each state and in Washington, D.C. Retailers were interviewed about Four Loko availability, volume, abv, price for one can, and discounts for buying more than one can.

The manufacturer of Four Loko has ignored requests from 17 State Attorneys General to reduce the high alcohol content of these products. To the contrary, they have recently introduced even higher abv products.

The researchers recommend passing legislation that improves regulation on Four Loko and other supersized alcopops. This would include increasing their price, removing them from the types of stores that underage youth have access to (e.g., gas stations and convenience stores), and launching an investigation from the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau on whether these products meet the federal definition for beer or manufacturers are evading federal and state taxes.

This summer, Rossheim will also be leading eye-tracking research to examine [alcohol](#) product packaging's appeal to youth.

**More information:** Matthew E. Rossheim et al, Price of Four Loko in Large U.S. Cities, 2018, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.14080](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.14080)

Provided by George Mason University

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