

New Alcoholic Drinks which Appeal to Youth -

Many parents and other adults believe that the youth who are drinking alcohol are consuming beer – not wine or liquor. The truth is that over the last 30 years the alcohol industry has created new products and marketing strategies that appeal to youth. Most adults have heard of wine coolers which were the first product of this type to be widely distributed. Since the appearance of wine coolers, flavored malt beverages otherwise known as alcopops are also widely available.

Alcopops



Alcopops Definition – Also known as flavored malt beverages or ready to drinks. These are sweet, sugary, carbonated alcoholic beverages that due to their taste and marketing appeal to younger drinkers. In Michigan these drinks must contain less than 20% alcohol. There are three subtypes of alcopops.

Flavored Malt Beverages with Distilled Spirit Additives – Popular brands include Mike's Hard Lemonade, Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Breezer. Traditionally alcohol by volume has been around 4-5% and been packaged in **bottles**. Recently Mike's Hard Lemonade has come out in a **can** called Mike's Harder Lemonade with 8% alcohol/volume.

Flavored Malt Beverages With Stimulants – Also known as alcohol energy drinks (AEDs). These prepackaged beverages combined alcohol with caffeine, and other stimulants commonly associated with non-alcoholic energy drinks. Popular brands

included, Core, Four/Four Loko, and Joose. In November 2010 AEDs were banned by the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and then subsequently by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Flavored Malt Beverages Without Stimulants – Popular brands include Sparks and Tilt which were previously AEDs before MillerCoors and Anheuser-Busch, brewers of Sparks and Tilt removed the stimulants from these two alcoholic beverages. The size of the cans and percentage of alcohol tends to be increasing - 16 oz. to 24 oz. cans (instead of 12) with 8-10% alcohol (instead of 6). Four Loko (a banned AED) has already begun appearing in other states without stimulants.

Alcopops are popular with junior and senior high school students. In a 2007 survey, 12% of 8th graders, 22% of 10th graders, and 9% of 12th graders reported consuming alcopops within the last 30 days. Girls are much more likely to consume alcopops than boys. The younger the drinker, the more likely he/she will consume alcopops. Among 8th grade drinkers, 78% report alcopop consumption in the last 30 days compared to 59% of 19-20 year olds and 36% of 25-30 year olds.

Marketing – These beverages have been marketed in ways that mimic the marketing of non-alcoholic energy drinks. They use non-traditional media and “grassroots” one-to-one communications including internet sites, chat rooms, social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Alcopops do not fit neatly within the traditional alcohol categories of wine, beer, or distilled spirits. Alcohol industry representatives market these products as “malt beverages,” and label them as such. This practice offers alcopops the favorable regulatory position of beer, allowing for much wider availability and lower taxes. The State tax rate for spirits is much higher than beer (\$10.61/gallon vs. \$.20/gallon) and may be sold by only 3,970 liquor retail outlets as compared to 7,359 outlets for beer. (January 14, 2009).

Parents must become educated about these products, aware of what is available in stores, and what their children's friends are drinking. Talk to other parents and your children. Alcopops are dangerous because they don't taste like alcohol, they are inexpensive, their alcohol content is increasing, and their size of container is getting larger.