

## ***Alcohol 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. Many are not aware of other newer malt beverages.

Alcopops, also known as “malternatives,” “RTDs” (ready to drink), or “FMBs” (flavored malt beverages), are sweet, sugary alcoholic beverages that look and taste like lemonade, cola, punch, and tea. Some popular brands are Mike’s Hard Lemonade and Harder Lemonade, Smirnoff Ice, Skyy Blue, Captain Morgan Gold, and Bacardi Silver.



Alcopops contain less than 10% of alcohol by volume (usually 5-6%) consisting of distilled spirits that is mixed with nonalcoholic beverages or flavoring or coloring materials. These drinks are usually sold in packages of 4-6 11-12 oz. bottles. Some are now sold individually in larger bottles or cans and contain higher percentages of alcohol by volume. Four Loko and Blast are sold in 24 ounce cans with 12% alcohol by volume. Tilt has 10% alcohol by volume. These sell for about \$2.50 a can.

Advertisements for these “starter” drinks make them appealing to young drinkers, particularly girls and young women who do not like the taste of traditional alcohol products.

Michigan high school students consume less alcohol than high school students nationally. Fifty-nine percent report no consumption. Of the 41 percent that did have at least one drink in the previous 30 days: 38 percent consumed liquor, 19 percent consumed beer, 16 percent consumed no particular type of alcohol, and 15 percent consumed malt beverages. When broken down by gender more males consumed beer and more females consumed malt beverages (21 percent) and wine coolers.<sup>1</sup>



These drinks do not fit neatly within the traditional alcohol categories of wine, beer, or distilled spirits. These products are popular and dangerous because of their sweet, sugary taste and cheap price. These 24 ounce servings with high alcohol content contain the equivalent of four normal beers.

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. This is the current practice in Michigan. In November of 2011 there were 7,921 retail licensees that could sell these malt beverages.

Research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that raising the price on alcohol reduces many of the harms associated with the misuse of alcohol: deaths and injuries from alcohol related traffic crashes, violence, sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence, and cirrhosis of the liver. It has also shown that higher outlet density creates more availability and increased harm.

**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. Become an advocate for change.**

<sup>1</sup> Gonzales K, Boynton K, Cameron L. Type of Alcohol Consumed by Michigan Youth. *Michigan Alcohol Surveillance Brief*. Vol. 1, No. 5 Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Community Health, Bureau of Epidemiology and Division of Genomics, Perinatal health, and Chronic disease Epidemiology, Nov. 2010.