

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

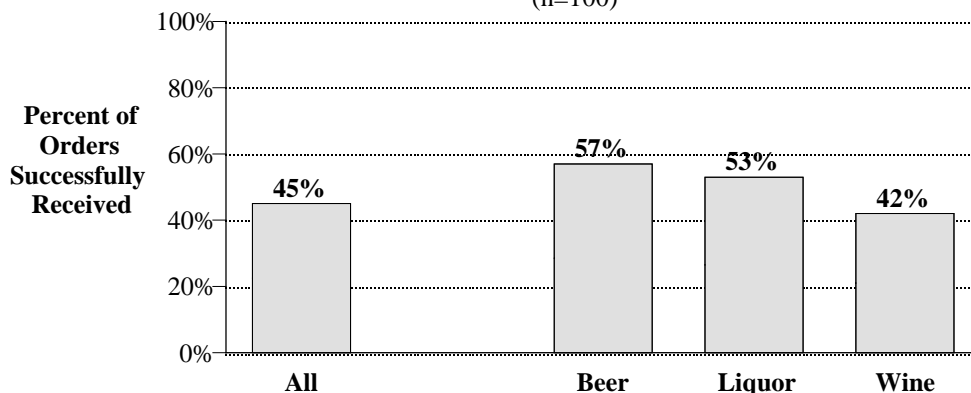
University of Maryland, College Park

Study Finds Underage Youth in U.S. Easily Purchase Alcohol Online

“Age verification procedures used by internet alcohol vendors do not adequately prevent online sales to minors,” according to the first peer-reviewed study to examine the age verification practices of internet alcohol vendors and the ability of minors can purchase alcohol online. Underage adults ages 18 to 20 attempted to purchase alcohol from 100 popular internet vendors. The underage purchasers were allowed by the study protocol to misrepresent their age by clicking a checkbox indicating they were 21 or older or by providing a false birth date, but were not allowed to alter their own identification card, use a friends’ or relative’s identification, or use any other strategies to misrepresent their age. Of 100 alcohol purchase attempts, 45% were successfully purchased and delivered to these underage buyers. Beer was most likely to be successfully purchased and delivered (57%), followed by liquor (53%) and wine (42%; see figure below). Forty-one percent of the vendors made no attempts to verify age at the point of order and 18% used weak or no age verification techniques, including checkboxes or buttons indicating age and passive consent of age by merely submitting an order (data not shown). In addition, “age verification at delivery was inconsistently conducted and, when attempted, failed about half of the time” (p. E1). The authors suggest that future research look at the “proportion of minors who buy alcohol online and test purchases from more vendors to inform enforcement of existing policies and creation of new policies to reduce youth access to alcohol online” (p. E1).

**Percentage of Internet Alcohol Orders Successfully Purchased by
and Delivered to U.S. Underage Buyers**

(n=100)



NOTES: Eight 18- to 20-year-old individuals in the U.S. attempted to purchase alcohol online from 100 popular alcohol vendor websites, under the supervision of study staff, from July 14-27, 2011.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Williams, Rebecca S. and Ribisl, Kurt M., “Internet Alcohol Sales to Minors,” *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, published online May 7, 2012. Available online at <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1149402>. For more information, contact Dr. Williams at rebeccawilliams@unc.edu.

Also see the accompanying editorial: Jernigan, D. H., “Who is Minding the Virtual Alcohol Store?”, *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, published online May 7, 2012. Available online at <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1149406>.