



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

ARE 'READY TO DRINKS' MORE PALATABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE? NEW STUDY RECOMMENDS GREAT CAUTION WITH MILK-BASED DRINKS

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Great caution should be exercised when using milk as a base for a 'ready to drink' (RTD) product, say researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC). This is particularly the case with an alcoholic base that is less readily detected by adolescents, such as vodka.

These are the results of a world first study released today which aimed to determine the palatability of a range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages to teenagers and young adults.

Drinking alcohol is considered a normative behaviour in adolescence, with adolescent drinkers comprising a significant proportion of consumers for some beverages. One of the new and increasingly popular beverages is the RTD group of drinks. An RTD is a spirit or wine and a non-alcoholic drink, served in a pre-mixed format. The most popular of these products are mixtures of non-alcoholic beverages such as milk and soft drinks with alcoholic beverages, typically spirits. These RTDs are becoming increasingly popular, particularly among adolescent drinkers.

The study conducted by NDARC at the University of New South Wales recruited 350 participants, 70 in each of five age groups. Age groups of 12–13yrs, 14–15yrs, 16–17yrs, younger adults of 18–23yrs, and older adults of 24–30yrs were compared in the study. The experimental drinks included three sets of RTDs and their components: 1) *Coke*, *Jim Beam Bourbon* and their mix *bourbon & Coke*; 2) chocolate milk, vodka and their mix *Vodka Mudshake*; and 3) *Raspberry Fanta*, *Bacardi* and their mix *Watermelon Bacardi Breezer*, as well as beer, wine and a novel beverage.

Using a series of palatability tests, this study aimed to determine which beverages are most palatable to the adolescents and young adults and if this pattern changes with age.

Associate Professor Jan Copeland, lead author of the report, believes that one of the most important recommendations from this research is that not all RTD products are the same and each should be considered individually for its potential impact on adolescent drinking.

“The alcohol industry often discusses RTDs as one product whereas different drinks with different alcohol and non-alcoholic combinations and their packaging are perceived by adolescents in very different ways,” said Professor Copeland. “Some of these products are not viewed by young people as appealing in their taste and packaging, whereas others are extremely palatable and there is the belief held among adolescents that they are targeted towards them.”

As in most aspects of the study, the palatability of alcohol and the appeal of its packaging increased with age; however, chocolate *Mudshake*, and to a lesser extent watermelon *Breezer*, were perceived more like their soft drink base than their alcohol component.

“This suggests that great caution should be exercised when using milk as a base for an RTD, particularly with an alcoholic base that is less readily detected by adolescents, such as vodka,” said Professor Copeland. “Similarly, we believe that caution should be exercised when mixing any soft drink base with vodka in an RTD, as young people found it extremely difficult to identify the presence of that product in the tasting experiments.”

“There has been much speculation regarding the impact of RTDs on young people and their drinking behaviour. This study provides the first scientific evidence of the potential long-term impacts of these products on young people.”

The study also found that some alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer and bourbon are successful at not targeting adolescents and, therefore, attention should be given to the way these products are being promoted, and the lessons learnt applied in the future marketing of RTDs.

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For further information contact Paul Dillon

(02) 9385 0226 (W)
0419 402 099 (M)