# When will the season of alcohol and sport end?

In our house, there’s always sport on. Growing up in country NSW, we either played sport or watched it, live at local fields or on the TV.

Watching sport is one of the ways that we spend time together as a family, and I love listening to my six-year-old and her dad banter about whatever game, match or event is on.

Right now, there is much excitement in my household about the State of Origin.

But there’s something else on too, and our kids are taking notice. Research released by Deakin University recently analysed the number of alcohol ads shown during sport on free-to-air television networks.

This study counted a staggering 10,660 alcohol ads shown across free-to-air networks in five capital cities during sport over 12 months. Many of these were shown during children’s viewing times (5am-8.30pm).

The same study found that the number of alcohol ads averaged 75 minutes each week – around 11 episodes of Bluey’s-worth of pure alcohol marketing flowing straight from our televisions into our family homes.

This isn’t by mistake.

We know that young people are especially impressionable and that exposure to alcohol marketing influences how they go on to use alcohol, including increasing the chances that they will start drinking in greater quantities and from a younger age. 1, 2, 3

The alcohol companies know this, and this new study found that almost half (44.7%) of alcohol company marketing dollars committed to advertising slots were where they knew kids would be watching.4

The community expects measures to be in place to protect our kids from alcohol advertising. In fact, free-to-air TV’s own code of conduct doesn’t allow ads promoting harmful products like alcohol to be aired during children’s viewing times.

But there’s a catch.

There is an exemption that allows alcohol ads to be aired any time of day so long as it's during televised sport.

And alcohol companies are making the most of it.

In fact, alcohol is so heavily inserted into sports that our kids could be forgiven for thinking it was a natural part of the sequence of a game.

And why wouldn’t they think that, when children of families tuning in to their favourite sports are wrongly being shown time and time again that if there’s a celebration, you cannot do it without alcohol?

What's worse is that if the way in which alcohol appears alongside celebrations in sport was a stand-alone ad, it would violate the alcohol industry’s own advertising code.

At a time when families and young people have never been under so much pressure, and when alcohol is flowing into homes at unprecedented levels, do we really need alcohol companies’ ads freely flowing into our loungerooms, too?

We all know that as we head to the peak of the NRL and AFL seasons, the alcohol ads will be freely flowing, uninvited, into our family rooms once more.

In the State of Origin alone, there are five official alcohol company sponsors for just three games of league.

Many people in the community have spoken up about how they feel uncomfortable about alcohol playing such a prominent role in sporting celebrations around large events. Many questioned the message that it sends our kids and the broader community.

The conversation has changed.

People are noticing and saying that the glorification and deep entrenchment of alcohol in sports is not ok.

Australian families and the broader community expect – and deserve – a safe space for children and families to enjoy sport, alcohol-free.

It’s time that there are regulations in place to reflect the strong community call for change.

1 Anderson P, De Bruijn A, Angus K, Gordon R, Hastings G. Impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescent alcohol use: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Alcohol Alcoholism*. 2009;44(3):229-43.

2 Smith LA, Foxcroft DR. The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behaviour in young people: systematic review of prospective cohort studies. *BMC Public Health*. 2009;9(1):51.

3 Jernigan D, Noel J, Landon J, Thornton N, Lobstein T. Alcohol marketing and youth alcohol consumption: a systematic review of longitudinal studies published since 2008. *Addiction*. 2017;112:7-20.

4 Martino F, Ananthapavan J, Moodie M, Sacks G. Potential financial impact on television networks of a ban on alcohol advertising during sports broadcasts in Australia. *Australia New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 2022