Conclusion This study showed substantial competing interests amongst scientists commenting on the use of antivirals and/or vaccines in H1N1 influenza during the period the UK government was deciding its pharmaceutical policy. Since commentaries in the media provide an alternative route for external pressure on health policy decisions, scientists should declare any potential competing interests for media interviews as for journal articles.

Background Increasing evidence suggests that exposure to alcohol marketing increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to drink alcohol and that among those who already consume alcohol exposure to alcohol advertising is likely to increase its use. Existing research in Europe has tended to focus on the content of alcohol marketing and advertising but our understanding of the actual levels of exposure remains inadequate. This study aims to contribute to filling this gap by analysing youth exposure to television alcohol advertising in the UK.

Methods We obtained data on viewership and on alcohol advertising volume for the top ten television channels with the highest number of viewers in the UK by age (4–9, 10–15, 16–24, 25 plus) for December 2010 to May 2011. Data were analysed descriptively to characterise youth viewership by channel, month and time of the day (‘daypart’) and alcohol advertising exposure. We then used a negative binomial regression model to measure incidental youth exposure to alcohol advertising relative to adults over 25 years of age. We applied sensitivity analyses to test robustness of the model.

Results Viewership and alcohol advertising volume varied substantially across the 10 channels, months and dayparts. Children and adolescents (10–15 years) constituted 4% of the total audience and young people (16–24 years) 8%, yet their exposure to alcohol commercials was 5% and 50%, respectively. Relative to adults 25 years of age and older, the regression analysis found advert intensity was higher where children and adolescents constituted a greater proportion of the viewership (incident rate ratio (IRR) 1.09, 95% CI 1.02, 1.17, p = 0.013). This relationship was particularly strong for commercials of beer and cider (IRR = 1.14, 95% CI 1.06, 1.23, p = 0.000), super market brands (IRR = 1.16, 95% CI 1.07, 1.28, p = 0.000), and ready-mix drinks (IRR = 1.51, 95% CI 1.27, 1.78, p = 0.000). In contrast, although the IRR for those aged 16 to 24 years also differed significantly from that observed for older adults, the difference was small (1.02, 95% CI 1.01, 1.04, p = 0.003 ). There were no statistically significant associations for wine and spirit advert incidence and viewership for any of the younger population groups.

Conclusion Our findings suggest that young people in the UK have a disproportionately higher exposure to television alcohol (except wine and spirits) advertising than would be expected from general viewership patterns. Alcohol advertising practices should be modified to limit exposure of under age viewers.