

Alcohol

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>

Key Facts

- Alcohol contains **ethanol**, a psychoactive and toxic substance that can cause dependence.
 - In 2019, **2.6 million deaths** globally were caused by alcohol consumption:
 - 1.6 million from noncommunicable diseases
 - 700,000 from injuries
 - 300,000 from communicable diseases
 - Alcohol-related deaths were **heaviest among men** (2 million) compared to 600,000 among women.
 - **400 million people**, or 7% of the world's population aged 15 and over, lived with alcohol use disorders.
 - Of these, **209 million** (3.7% of adults) had alcohol dependence.
 - Even low levels of alcohol consumption pose health risks. Most harms result from **heavy episodic or continuous drinking**.
 - Effective alcohol control interventions exist, and individuals should be informed of the risks to protect their health.
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Overview

Alcoholic beverages contain **ethanol**, a psychoactive, toxic, and dependence-inducing substance. While alcohol use is rooted in many cultures, it brings serious health risks.

- In 2019, **2.6 million global deaths** were linked to alcohol, with **52.9 and 52.2 deaths per 100,000 people** in the European and African WHO regions, respectively.

- **People aged 20–39 years** were disproportionately affected, with 13% of alcohol-related deaths in this group.
- From 2010 to 2019, alcohol-attributable deaths per 100,000 people **decreased by 20.2% globally**.

Though many countries have developed national alcohol policies, **industry interference** remains a challenge.

- **54%** of 145 countries had treatment guidelines for alcohol use disorders.
 - Only **46%** had legal protections for confidentiality in treatment.
 - Access to treatment, medications, and intervention services remains **very low**, with contact rates ranging from **<1% to 14%** in countries reporting such data.
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Health Risks of Alcohol Use

Alcohol plays a **causal role** in over **200 diseases, injuries, and conditions**, although strong scientific evidence exists for only **31 conditions**.

Associated health risks include:

- **Noncommunicable diseases:** liver disease, cardiovascular disease, various cancers
- **Mental health conditions:** depression, anxiety, alcohol use disorders
- **Cardiovascular disease:** 474,000 deaths in 2019 due to alcohol
- **Cancer:** Alcohol is a **known carcinogen**. In 2019, 4.4% of all cancer diagnoses and 401,000 cancer deaths were alcohol-related.

Infectious diseases: Alcohol increases risk of **tuberculosis and HIV**.

Pregnancy risks:

- Alcohol consumption increases risk of **fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs)** and **fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)**
- Also linked to **miscarriage, stillbirth, and preterm birth**

Social consequences: Long-term harmful drinking can cause:

- Family and relationship issues
- Employment and financial problems
- Legal and societal consequences

Factors Affecting Alcohol Consumption and Harm

There is **no risk-free level** of alcohol consumption.

Risk depends on:

- Amount and frequency of drinking
- Age, sex, health status, and personal characteristics
- Cultural and situational context

Some groups are **more vulnerable** to alcohol's toxic and addictive effects. Others with low-risk patterns may not face as many health consequences, but risk is still present.

Societal influences:

- Social and cultural norms
- Alcohol availability
- Policy enforcement
- Economic conditions

Patterns of consumption—especially **heavy episodic drinking**—are responsible for most alcohol-related harm.

Context matters: The setting in which alcohol is consumed (e.g., alone, socially, before driving) influences outcomes such as accidents or violence.