# Council curbs on alcohol cut hospital visits

**Alcohol misuse costs the NHS an estimated £3.5 billion a year**

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Local councils that limit new alcohol licences have fewer alcohol-related hospital admissions, according to new research. In areas with the most restrictive licensing policies, admissions in the first quarter of 2015 were 5 per cent lower than expected in 2009.

Alcohol misuse costs the NHS an estimated £3.5 billion a year, with wider costs to society including £11 billion on crime and £7.3 billion in lost productivity. About a third of women and four in ten men exceed the recommended weekly alcohol limits.

The National Institute for Health Research assessed the licensing policies and responses to licensing applications of 326 local authorities between 2007-8 and 2011-12, as well as the number of alcohol-related hospital admissions from 2009 to the first quarter of 2015. They scored councils based on whether they used their powers to restrict new outlets in certain areas, and on whether they refused licences for new premises. Each was put into a category: no activity; low; medium; or high.

After correcting for factors such as levels of deprivation, the team found that in areas with “high” restrictions, drink-related admissions fell by 2 per cent every year from 2009. In “medium” areas, admissions fell by an average of 0.6 per cent annually, twice the fall in areas without an active policy.

Jackie Ballard, the chief executive of Alcohol Concern, said: “In the face of persistent attempts by the alcohol industry to get more licences and longer licensing hours, it’s good to see many local authorities standing firm.”

The study is published today in the BMJ[*Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*](http://jech.bmj.com/).