



Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
 American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation
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Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems



Volume 115, Number 4 - November 2020

A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems,
 an entity of the American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation

Take action to support MICAP

With the support of its board of directors and passionate supporters, the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems has testified before the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and the State Legislative Committees through four attempts by legislators to lengthen the hours of alcohol sales in Michigan. This year's testimony makes number five. Clearly, there are politicians and business persons who own bars or sell beverage alcohol who want the hours changed regardless of the harm it will do. We will continue to stand up to the Michigan House and Senate against additional sales hours, but we need your help. As a regular reader of the RECAP, you can help us influence our lawmakers. Please write to your Representatives and Senators and inform them of the dangers this legislation will cause to our citizens and communities in Michigan.

2020 has been a challenging and unsettling year for people throughout the world, and here in Michigan. For those who care about someone with an alcohol use disorder, COVID-19 has surely brought more worry and concern over growing statistical evidence that the causes and risks of increased use are staggering. As the holiday season approaches, we hope you will include MICAP in your charitable plans for year-end giving, so that we can continue to provide our readers and friends with the knowledge, understanding and compassion required to mitigate the harmful effects of excessive beverage alcohol use on our families, friends and neighbors. Thank you.

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New Alcohol Recommendations, Increasing Use in the Pandemic, Latest Studies

By Dr. Vernon Smith, Ph.D., MICAP Board Member

Recent studies have highlighted the latest information on alcohol use and alcohol-related problems, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, new federal recommendations are coming on limiting alcohol consumption. Below we report on some of the most significant and timely reports and studies.

CDC To Issue New 2020 Guidelines for Alcohol Use

The biggest news in decades about recommendations for alcohol use came from the CDC in August 2020. In an 835-page report, the CDC indicated that it is making significant changes to its recommendations on alcohol use, and the recommendation is clear: consume less alcohol.

Every five years the federal government updates its nutrition recommendations for Americans. In preparation for the "2020 – 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans," an expert advisory committee published its recommendations, which will be the foundation of the upcoming report when it is published later in 2020. The Guidelines are evidence-based recommendations, based on the latest scientific research. The guidelines are designed to help every American make healthier decisions about what they eat and drink.

Regarding alcohol consumption, the report makes two major changes to previous guidance. Until this year, the Dietary Guidelines recommended no more than "moderate" alcohol intake, defined as no more than one drink per day for women, and two drinks per day for men. The new report will change that recommendation to no more than one drink per day, eliminating the distinction between men and women. Equally significant, the new Guidelines will omit any mention of potential benefits of moderate alcohol consumption. Past reports have alluded to potential benefits. However, recent scientific findings have repeatedly pointed to the role of alcohol in a range of health issues, especially cancer and liver disease, and these risks are now seen as outweighing any small potential protective heart benefits of moderate alcohol use. What is now known is that alcohol affects almost every organ of your body, both short-term and long-term. The evidence suggests there is no "safe limit," and the risk of adverse health effects increases with each drink. Alcohol use weakens the immune system and thus reduces the ability

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to cope with infectious diseases. Alcohol, even in very small quantities, is known to cause certain types of cancer.

The consensus recommendation is this: If you don't drink now, don't start. If you do drink, consumption should be limited to moderate levels or less. From a health and safety standpoint, the evidence now says that the less alcohol consumed, the better.

The new Guidelines focus on health, but alcohol has other known risks as well:

- Alcohol alters thoughts, judgement, decision-making and behavior.
- Alcohol, even in small amounts, is a risk to an unborn child at any time during pregnancy.
- Alcohol increases violence, including partner violence, sexual violence, youth violence, elder abuse, and violence against children.
- Alcohol increases the risk of death and injury from traffic injuries, drowning and falls.

Alcohol Use and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Numerous news stories have reported increases in alcohol and other substance abuse-related deaths since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dealing with the pandemic has necessarily increased social isolation. However, the isolation has also resulted in a loss of support and a disruption in care and treatment. For many, it has also brought on unemployment and economic stress, which together has increased the risk for persons suffering from substance abuse disorders and addictions.

In response to inaccurate information about alcohol and COVID-19, the CDC in June addressed some common misconceptions by publishing these facts:

- Drinking alcohol does not protect you from COVID-19.
- Drinking alcohol weakens your body's ability to fight infections, increasing the risk of

complications and making it harder to get better if you are sick.

- Alcohol use increases the risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome and pneumonia, which are sometimes associated with COVID-19.

The most important takeaway is that drinking alcohol does nothing to protect anyone from COVID-19. In fact alcohol consumption, even at moderate levels, increases the risk of infection and complications.

More Americans are Drinking Themselves to Death

In just two decades, the number of Americans drinking themselves to death has more than doubled.

A 2020 report from The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) showed a dramatic and disturbing increase in alcohol related deaths. The study looked at death certificates for Americans who died between 1999 and 2017. In 1999, a total of 35,914 deaths were alcohol related. By 2017, alcohol-related deaths more than doubled to 72,558. Alcohol-related deaths totaled almost a million persons over the study period, as the death rate, expressed as deaths per 100,000 population, increased by 51% from 16.9 to 25.5.

The most common alcohol-related deaths are those resulting from liver disease, overdose from alcohol or alcohol mixed with other drugs, cancer and alcohol-related accidents. Alcohol related deaths were highest among men, but the largest increases were among women. In particular, the greatest increases were among non-Hispanic white women, and all persons ages 55 to 64.

The actual number of alcohol related deaths is undoubtedly higher, because death certificates often do not indicate alcohol's role in mortality. Studies have shown, for example, that death certificates for persons killed in drunk driving accidents are unlikely to list alcohol as a factor. Only one out of six such deaths indicated they were alcohol related.

Binge Drinkers are Drinking More

The CDC warned in a 2020 report that binge drinkers are drinking more. Binge drinking is defined as four drinks on one occasion for women, and five

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drinks per occasion for men. Looking at the period from 2011 to 2017, the most recent data available, binge drinkers consumed 529 drinks on average in 2017, a significant increase from the average of 472 drinks in 2011. Binge drinking increased the most among women over age 30 without children, and among all Americans over age 50.

Alcohol Use Is a Major Problem for Americans Over 65

More than one in 10 Americans ages 65 and older is a binge drinker. Alcohol use can be a major issue for anyone, but for seniors, it is especially dangerous, according to a recent study by the NIAAA. Despite the risk, alcohol misuse has been increasing among Baby Boomers and seniors. In fact, it was up about 20% last decade.

"Older adults are especially vulnerable to the harms of alcohol use, especially binge drinking, due to physiological changes of aging and the higher likelihood of having more chronic medical disease and taking more prescribed medications," lead study author Benjamin Han told MarketWatch. "Binge drinking can increase the risk for injury for older adults, especially falls, and can exacerbate existing chronic disease such as hypertension."

Seniors are especially at risk from interactions of alcohol and their medications and supplements, even over-the-counter herbal and other remedies. Alcohol can make them either less effective, or can do the opposite and increase their potency so they become dangerous. In particular, seniors are at risk of life-threatening interactions if they are taking pain medications, sleeping pills, or anti-depressants.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, alcohol issues are especially important, as people worldwide deal with the stresses of isolation and all the economic and health consequences of job loss and illness. The new CDC Dietary Guidelines highlight the emerging consensus that any level of alcohol use has significant health and safety consequences, and that no level of alcohol use is safe or healthy.

The Rise in Excessive Alcohol Consumption and What We Can Do About It

by Rev. W. J. Amundsen, Retired
Board Member and Treasurer,
Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems (MICAP)

The recent studies and reports on alcohol reveal world-wide trends in excessive use and binge-drinking. The rise of beverage alcohol consumption is a leading risk factor for a growing global health burden, from chronic diseases and behavioral health issues, to alcohol-related injuries, domestic violence and other crimes. A specific study supported by the World Health Organization suggests that the average alcohol ingestion has been steadily on the rise worldwide. That is a very burdensome trend to reverse, yet it serves as an important frame of reference in addressing the problem here in Michigan where our statewide snapshot offers a similar picture; people are drinking more.

So, what can we do? The experts have met, and have published "The Community Guide," a resource from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF), with scientific and administrative support from the CDC. The guide identifies which community-based practices are most effective in combating excessive alcohol consumption, which include the following:

- Dram Shop Laws are effective in holding establishments liable for civil damages in certain circumstances in providing alcohol to a patron who later got into an accident and harmed someone else.
- Electronic screening promotes the use of computers, telephones and other mobile devices to screen people for excessive alcohol use and also to deliver a brief intervention, preferably done in a medical setting.
- An increase in the alcohol tax is supported by many studies across the U.S., providing overwhelming evidence that raising the tax reduces consumption!
- Maintaining limits on sale hours of beverage alcohol is proven to help mitigate excessive drinking.

The Community Guide also strongly suggests that Michigan not give up its Control State Status. To transfer the ownership of beverage alcohol control to individuals and corporations could create a short-term windfall for the state, yet is certain to ensure a long-term disaster, as a few states who have done so have regretfully discovered. To learn more, visit <https://thecommunityguide.org>.