

Reducing the Harms from Drinking too Much by Limiting Access to Alcohol



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Excessive alcohol use in the U.S. takes an enormous toll on individuals, families, and communities. One way to help people drink less and to prevent the dangers that arise from drinking too much is to limit access to purchasing alcohol at the state or community levels. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Guide to Community Preventive Services (Community Guide) shows that regulating the availability of alcohol, including maintaining limits on the number of days and hours when alcohol can be sold, is a strategy that works to reduce excessive alcohol use and related health and social problems.

When states or communities increase the number of hours and days when alcohol can be sold in bars, restaurants, and liquor stores, the result is more drinking and more harms from drinking, especially motor-vehicle crashes. The Community Guide studies found that people are more likely to experience harms from drinking too much, including motor-vehicle crashes, violence, assault and injuries, when national, state, and local policies remove previously banned alcohol sales on weekend days (usually Sundays) or when communities increase the hours that alcohol can be sold by 2 or more hours. At the same time, when governments create new limits on the days of alcohol sale, this helps to protect community residents, even non-drinkers, from experiencing the many harms of excessive drinking.

The Community Guide studies, which were posted online by the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, considered all of the scientific evidence on what happens when changing the days or hours when alcohol can be sold. Fourteen studies of the effects of changes in the days of sale and ten studies of the effects of changing the hours of sale were analyzed using a state-of-the-art systematic review process. After reviewing all of the best available scientific evidence, the U.S. Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent, nonfederal body of public health experts, recommended maintaining limits on

the days or hours during which alcohol can legally be sold to protect the public's health.

Community prevention that works

States and communities can decide when and where alcohol can be sold by supporting laws that are proven to reduce excessive alcohol use and related harms to drinkers and others. Regulating the availability of alcohol, including maintaining limits on the number of days and hours when alcohol can be sold, as well as the number of places that sell alcohol, are strategies proven to reduce many of the harmful outcomes of drinking too much alcohol, even for non-drinkers.

Excessive alcohol use

Excessive alcohol use, including binge and underage drinking, is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States. This dangerous behavior is responsible for more than 79,000 deaths annually and a wide range of health and social problems. For each death due to alcohol, on average, an individual's life is cut short by 30 years. Excessive alcohol use costs the U.S. approximately \$185 billion each year in health care and criminal justice expenses, as well as lost worker productivity.

The Community Guide

The Community Guide is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations and findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services (Task Force) -- an independent, nonfederal, volunteer body of public health and prevention experts -- makes these findings and recommendations based on systematic reviews of scientific literature conducted under the auspices of the Community Guide. CDC staff provides ongoing scientific, administrative and technical support for the Task Force.

Scientific methods

The Community Guide conducts state-of-the-art systematic reviews that: analyze all available scientific evidence on what works to promote health and prevent disease, injury and disability; assess the economic benefits of the interventions found to be effective; and identify critical research gaps. Community Guide review teams are led or supported by Community Guide scientists, and include government, academic, policy and practice-based partners.

Visit www.thecommunityguide.org for more information on strategies to prevent excessive alcohol use and related harms.