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## **Report Says Alcohol Tax Hike Caused Drop In Sex Disease Rates**

By Joel McCord  
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The more it costs to get drunk, the less chance there is of spreading sexually transmitted diseases. At least that's the conclusion you could draw from a report released Wednesday from a public health advocacy group.

The study by three University of Florida researchers found that the number of cases of gonorrhea in Maryland dropped by 24 percent--or 1,600 cases annually-- after the General Assembly raised the alcohol sales tax. It was published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

The Maryland Citizens Health Initiative, which lobbied for the increase from six percent to 9 percent in 2011, was among the groups releasing the report.

"Alcohol abuse leads to bad sexually related decisions," said coalition president Vincent DeMarco. "Unwanted sex, date rape, non-use of condoms, many other things like that."

And increased alcohol taxes lead to a decrease in alcohol abuse, he argued.

The study also estimated the decrease in gonorrhea rates led to a savings of more than \$500,000 in medical expenses and suggested that an even greater increase in the alcohol tax would lead to "even more dramatic reductions in suffering and health costs."

The results reflect those of a prior study done in Illinois.

Demarco said his group will use the study to push for a \$1 a pack cigarette tax increase in the next General Assembly session.