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Risky Drinking Cited in 1 in 10 Early Deaths

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Excessive drinking contributes to nearly one in 10 deaths among working-age adults, a CDC analysis found.

Among 20- to 64-year-olds, 9.8% of all mortality from 2006 to 2010 was attributable to excessive drinking, Mandy Stahre, PhD, MPH, a CDC officer assigned to the Washington State Department of Health in Olympia, and colleagues at the CDC found.

That averaged out to 87,798 deaths annually from binge drinking, or from having more than 14 drinks a week for men or eight a week for women, the group reported in the June issue of *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

[David H. Jernigan, PhD](#), director of the Johns Hopkins Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, called the findings a striking call to action for physicians.

"In the pediatric and adult setting, it's critical that physicians regularly screen their patients for alcohol use," he told *MedPage Today*. "Heavy drinking starts in adolescence."

For those patients who think they "occasionally have too much ... the evidence shows brief alcohol information in the context of a primary care visit can make a difference," Jernigan



Action Points

- Among working-age adults, almost one in 10 deaths in the U.S. from 2006 to 2010 were attributable to excessive drinking, a study found.
- The most common cause of chronic alcohol-attributable deaths was alcoholic liver disease, while the most common cause of acute alcohol-attributable deaths was motor-vehicle traffic crashes.

said.

"People mostly think that there are two problems with alcohol – alcohol addiction and motor vehicle crashes," he noted. "This study shows what other studies have shown – but in the general population – that there are so many other causes of death from alcohol – cancers [and] heart disease, as well as the other acute causes like drowning, falls, and so on."

Binge drinking (five or more drinks on a single occasion) accounted for 44% of the alcohol-related deaths, most often due to motor-vehicle crashes.

Of the chronic causes of alcohol-associated death, alcoholic liver disease was the most common in the analysis of the CDC Alcohol-Related Disease Impact online tool data. That online tool estimates alcohol-associated deaths by combining death certificate data to get the number of deaths by age and sex from 54 different alcohol-related causes, together with the alcohol-attributable fraction for that cause of death.

The researchers also found that:

- Age-adjusted alcohol-attributable deaths occurred at a rate of 27.9 per 100,000 population, which put alcohol above 10 of the top 15 causes of death over the study period. The 20- to 64-year-olds studied accounted for 69% of all alcohol-related deaths in the U.S.
- The 2.5 million years of potential life lost to overdrinking over that period represented more than 1 in 10 such years lost overall among working-age Americans.
- Alcohol-related death rates ranged from a high of 51.2 deaths per 100,000 population in New Mexico to a low of 19.1 per 100,000 in New Jersey.

The variations by state "probably reflect differences in the prevalence of excessive drinking, particularly binge drinking, which is affected by state and local laws governing the price, availability, and marketing of alcoholic beverages," the researchers wrote.

Tackling those factors more widely, as recommended by the Community Preventive Services Task Force, by raising prices through alcohol taxes, enforcing vendor liability, and regulating how many alcohol outlets are allowed in a given area, could reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its consequences, they noted.

Those mortality consequences were likely underestimated in the study, Jernigan noted, pointing to the use of self-reported alcohol intake from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey.

"Surveys only capture about 30% of alcohol intake," he said. "We know how much is sold, and people are definitely under-reporting."

The researchers also cited as limitations the exclusion of deaths among former drinkers and of alcohol as a contributing factor to death, rather than the underlying cause, on vital statistics records.

Another reason for the mortality underestimate is that people killed by drunk drivers may

not have been counted as alcohol-related deaths, added [Robert E. Gwyther, MD, MBA](#), a co-director of the education program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Center for Alcohol Studies.

Moreover, deaths aren't the only harm from alcohol, he pointed out in an interview with *MedPage Today*.

The development of the ARDI application was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grants to the CDC Foundation.

The researchers disclosed no relevant relationships with industry.

Jernigan disclosed no relevant relationships with industry.



Primary source: Preventing Chronic Disease

Source reference: Stahre M, et al "Contribution of excessive alcohol consumption to deaths and years of potential life lost in the United States" *Prev Chronic Dis* 2014; 11: 130293.

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