

Alcohol may be involved in up to 640,000 hospital admissions in England and Wales every year

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Alcohol may be involved in up to 640,000 hospital admissions and nearly 2 million visits to emergency care departments in England and Wales every year, suggests research published online in *Emergency Medicine Journal*.

The authors base their findings on the number of patients requiring treatment at one inner city emergency care department in the South West of England, and the [extrapolation](#) of those figures.

Almost a thousand adults seeking emergency care at Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI) over a period of four weeks in June 2009 were invited to take part in the anonymous study.

Each week was divided up into 14 periods of 12 hours, so that all relevant attendances were covered. Of those approached, 774 people were eligible and willing to take part.

An independent researcher asked each one if they had been [drinking alcohol](#) before their attendance in [emergency care](#), and then asked about their average weekly [alcohol consumption](#).

Treating clinicians were also asked their opinion as to whether a patient's emergency department attendance was either directly or indirectly related to alcohol, or was unrelated.

In all, around one in five (149; 19%) patients said they had drunk anything between half a unit and 50 units of alcohol before coming to the [emergency department](#). Some 14% (111) felt their attendance was related to alcohol, 87 (11%) of whom had sustained an injury.

Of these, just over half believed they had been injured by someone who had been drinking, while a similar proportion admitted to drinking more than the maximum recommended weekly units. Of the 111 patients who felt their attendance was related to alcohol, one in three was admitted to hospital.

Clinicians said that around one in five (21%) patient attendances was either directly (14%) or indirectly (7%) related to alcohol. And they felt that around one in 10 (8%) of all attendances were attributable to alcohol fuelled violence.

The authors caution that the BRI experience may not be applicable elsewhere. But they conclude: "If these figures are extrapolated, the number of patients presenting with alcohol related injury [exceeds] 7,000 attendances to the [BRI] annually, or nearly 2 million patients every year in England and Wales."

More information: What is the burden of alcohol related injuries in an inner city emergency department? Online First, [doi:10.1136/emered-2011-200510](https://doi.org/10.1136/emered-2011-200510)

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