

Alcohol consumption is a necessary cause of nearly 80,000 deaths per year in the Americas

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A new study published in the scientific journal *Addiction* by the Pan American Health Organization, a branch of the World Health Organization, has measured the number and pattern of deaths caused by alcohol consumption in 16 North and Latin American countries. The study reveals that between 2007 and 2009, alcohol was a 'necessary' cause of death (i.e., death would not have occurred in the absence of alcohol consumption) in an average of 79,456 cases per year. Liver disease was the main culprit in most countries.

According to the authors, Dr. Vilma Gawryszewski and Dr. Maristela Monteiro, "The mortality rates found in this study reveal the tip of the iceberg of a broader problem. There is a wide range of diseases and conditions linked to alcohol use, including tuberculosis, heart disease, stroke, epilepsy, falls, suicides, transport-related injuries, and interpersonal violence, among others. Our study simply shows how many deaths are wholly attributable to alcohol consumption. The number of deaths for which alcohol consumption is a significant contributing factor is likely to be much higher."

The highest death rates from alcohol consumption occurred in the Central American countries of El Salvador (averaging 27.4 out of 100,000 deaths per year), Guatemala (22.3), and Nicaragua (21.3). These were also three of the four countries in which the most consumed alcoholic beverage was spirits; Cuba was the fourth.

Men accounted for 84% of all deaths in which alcohol was a necessary

cause. However, the ratio male/female varied widely among countries. The risk of a man dying from an alcohol fully-related cause in El Salvador was 27.8 times higher than that of a woman, 18.9 in Nicaragua and 14.8 in Cuba. On the low end of the scale, the male mortality risk was 3.2 times higher than the female mortality risk in Canada and the USA, and 4.3 in Peru.

The risk of dying from [alcohol consumption](#) also differed by age group. In Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Paraguay and the USA, the highest [mortality rates](#) were seen among those aged 50-69 years. In Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, the rates started increasing from 40-49 years of age, remained stable, and then dropped after age 70. Mexico showed a different pattern, the risk of [death](#) escalating throughout life and reaching its peak after age 70. Each of those countries has a life expectancy of over 70 years.

More information: Gawryszewski VP and Monteiro MG. Mortality from diseases, conditions, and injuries where alcohol is a necessary cause in the Americas, 2007-2009. *Addiction*, 109: [DOI: 10.1111/add.12418](#)

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