

Research finds more EMS calls in areas with lots of licensed alcohol establishments

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Researchers found a 7.8 times higher risk of ambulance calls for patients with trauma in areas with the highest density of bars and restaurants licensed to serve alcohol, compared to a low density of such establishments.

The risk for trauma was especially pronounced among young males and in areas with a high density of establishments specifically focused on the sale of alcohol, such as sports bars, night clubs, pool halls and gaming facilities.

The findings, by Dr. Joel Ray, a physician at St. Michael's Hospital and a researcher in its Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, were published today in the journal *Medicine*. The study was conducted in Peel Region near Toronto, but Dr. Ray said the results are relevant to other jurisdictions.

Dr. Ray also found that EMS calls for assaults near a bar or restaurant peaked dramatically at 2 a.m., when the sale of alcohol must stop in the province of Ontario. Such calls nearly tripled at the end of the month when monthly paycheques are often deposited.

The study determined the risk of EMS calls in association with the density of bars and restaurants service alcohol in Peel, where all on-premise and off-premise [alcohol establishments](#) are licensed by the provincial government and the [legal drinking age](#) is 19.

The study found the relationship between the density of licensed alcohol

establishments and EMS calls for trauma ranged from 45.3 per 1,000 calls in areas with no on-premise licensed alcohol establishments to 381 per 1,000 in areas with the highest density of such establishments.

Dr. Ray's paper makes several policy recommendations, including limiting the opening of licensed alcohol establishments in areas that already have a large number of them, or areas that have an excessive number of EMS calls for assault or public intoxication.

He said the findings on the timing of the month and EMS calls for assault or intoxication reinforce the observation that [alcohol consumption](#) is related not just to the price of alcohol but also the availability of funds to buy it.

"We reiterate that public policies that raise prices of alcohol are an effective means to reduce drinking," he said. "Given the province of Ontario's actions to liberally increasing access to alcohol, such as through grocery stores, it is imperative that pricing remains high."

Finally, the paper notes that since 2.3 per cent of EMS calls in the study were related to intoxication, EMS personnel should consider using a checklist to determine whether people without serious injuries should be taken directly to a detoxification centre.

"Alcohol is a widely available substance that alters perception, and leads to behaviors that individuals might not otherwise engage in," Dr. Ray said. "Our study provides novel and comprehensive information about alcohol's availability within on-premise alcohol establishments, within a heavily regulated setting that few others can reproduce. It is time to take a more active stance about a substance that is legal, widely available - yet, harmful."

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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