

Study finds driverless cars reduce drunk driving, but increase binge drinking

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New Curtin research has found the introduction of driverless vehicles on our roads is likely to reduce drink-driving rates but could lead to greater levels of binge drinking.

The research, published in the *Drug and Alcohol Review*, found the increasing use of autonomous vehicles was likely to bring with it mixed [health outcomes](#) and therefore posed a challenge to policymakers in their efforts to minimize [alcohol](#)-related harms.

Lead author Research Associate Mr Leon Booth, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University, said by removing the need for a driver, autonomous vehicles were expected to substantially reduce rates of drink-driving.

"However, this benefit may be accompanied by an unintended negative consequence in the form of greater overall alcohol consumption due to increased availability of affordable and convenient transport," Mr Booth said.

"We surveyed 1334 adult Australians, about half of whom reported being likely to use an [autonomous vehicle](#) after consuming alcohol, while more than one-third were likely to consume more alcohol if they planned to use an autonomous [vehicle](#) (AV).

"Lower age, more frequent alcohol consumption, a [positive attitude](#) to autonomous vehicles and a preference for using 'ride-share' AVs were associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in these behaviors."

Study co-author John Curtin Distinguished Professor Simone Pettigrew, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University and The George Institute for Global Health, said with autonomous vehicles expected to become available to the [mass market](#) around the world by mid-2020, the research highlighted an emerging issue.

"Once autonomous vehicles become readily available they could be used as a means of facilitating out-of-home alcohol consumption and more frequent bouts of heavy drinking," Professor Pettigrew said.

"Because the introduction of the vehicles will likely bring both positive and [negative health effects](#), this represents a complex challenge for policymakers charged with reducing alcohol-related harms. A particular challenge will be the need to encourage the use of autonomous vehicles after drinking without encouraging drinking per se.

"Given that people's exposure to AVs has been very limited to date, more research will be needed as these vehicles become available on Australian roads, to assess whether people's drinking behaviors actually change in the manner they expect."

The research was co-authored by Associate Professor Richard Norman from the School of Public Health at Curtin University and funded by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre.

More information: Leon Booth et al. The potential effects of autonomous vehicles on alcohol consumption and drink-driving behaviours, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13055](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13055)

Provided by Curtin University

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