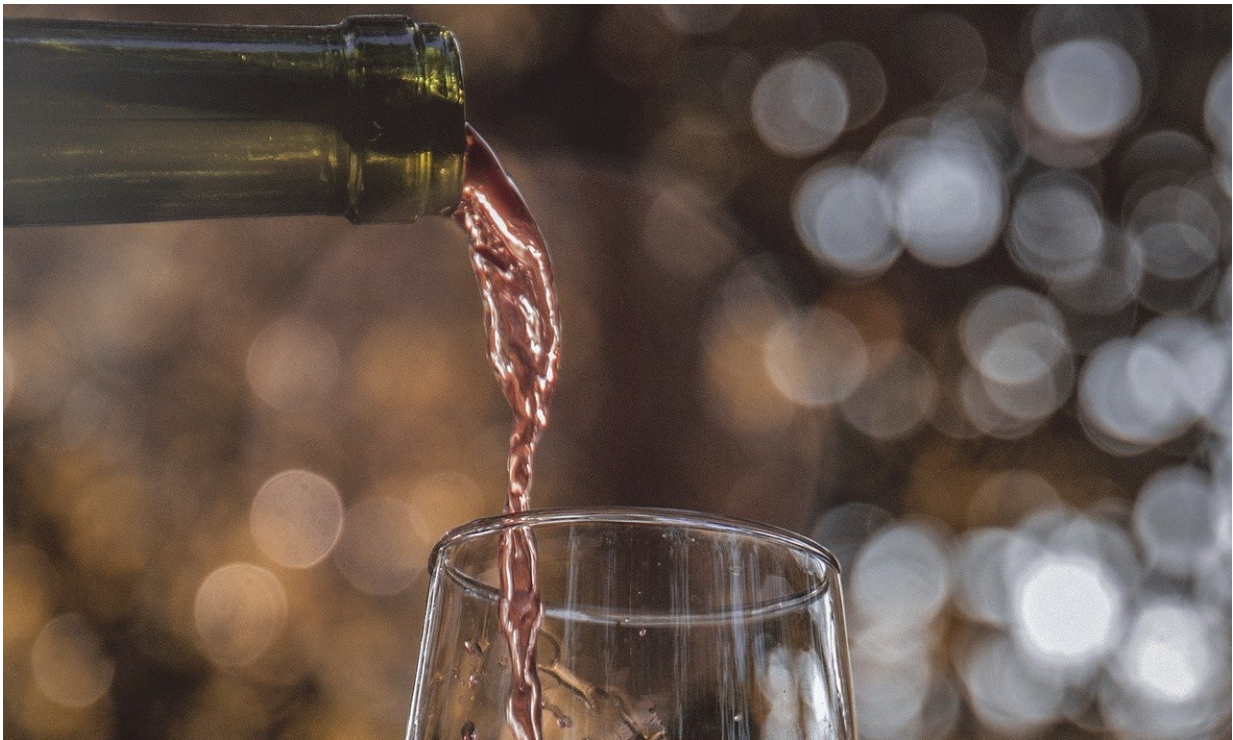


Lockdown measures linked to an increase in drinking at home

February 4 2022



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Lockdown measures throughout 2020 have been linked to people in Scotland and England drinking more at home, according to new research.

The latest study, from researchers at the University of Sheffield and

University of Glasgow, measured the impact of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 on [drinking](#) practices, using data on almost 300,000 adult drinkers.

The study, published in the journal *Addiction*, found that while people were broadly drinking the same amount of [alcohol](#) during periods of restrictions as they were when no restrictions were in place, lockdowns appeared to be linked to a shift in habits to at-home, late evening drinking.

In Scotland, the study found that there was also an increase in solitary drinking, although researchers say this could be explained by a higher proportion of people living alone in Scotland than in England.

At-home drinking remains an under-researched area, and while the long-term impacts of these recent changes are not yet known, the study authors suggest that these new drinking habits should be closely monitored as we move into a period of fewer restrictions.

During the first UK lockdown, venues such as pubs and restaurants were closed, affecting the type of locations where people could drink alcohol. Restrictions were eased from July 2020, with pubs and restaurants gradually allowed to reopen. However, from September 2020 in response to rising case numbers, a series of national and local restrictions were put in place that once again impacted hospitality settings.

The research team studied 41,500 adult drinkers in Scotland and more than 250,000 adult drinkers in England, focusing on the original March 2020 lockdown, the easing of restrictions in July 2020 and the onset of further restrictions in September 2020 until December 2020.

While figures show there was no statistical difference in the total number of alcohol units consumed each week during different periods of

the first year of the pandemic, more detailed analysis reveals that lockdown restrictions were associated with people starting to drink later in the day, and in Scotland where there is a higher proportion of people living alone, with more solitary drinking.

Dr. Abigail Stevely, co-author of the study from the University of Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group, said: "Despite some concerns that people might drink more in the day-time, we actually found that there was a shift towards people starting drinking later in the evening during lockdown restrictions. This perhaps reflects changes in people's routines and the absence of opportunities for daytime socialising such as going to the pub with colleagues after work.

"Although we found that lockdown restrictions did not change overall levels of alcohol consumption, there is evidence from other studies that heavier drinkers may have increased their consumption. It will be therefore important to continue monitoring drinking during the pandemic to prevent additional health problems in future."

The study's findings suggest shop-bought alcohol consumption increased following the March 2020 lockdown and remained persistently higher than previous years throughout the rest of 2020, even in the period when lockdown restrictions were eased. Meanwhile, hospitality alcohol consumption decreased following the March 2020 lockdown and remained lower than previous years throughout the remainder of 2020.

The researchers believe this is most likely explained by three reasons: even when on-trade premises reopened they were operating at reduced capacity; some venues (e.g. nightclubs and live music venues) remained closed; some people will have continued to stay away from hospitality settings even in periods of lesser restrictions over fears of catching COVID-19.

Dr. Iain Hardie, lead author of the study from the University of Glasgow MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, said: "Going forward it remains unclear what the long-term consequences will be of the changes in alcohol consumption in 2020. With hospitality premises back operating at closer to full capacity it's likely that alcohol consumption in these venues will move closer to pre-pandemic levels, although they could potentially decline again in response to new variants if restrictions are reintroduced or people are afraid of indoor spaces.

"However, the increase in home drinking in 2020 is a concern. We know from other studies that alcohol related harm has risen during the pandemic. The increase in home drinking is likely to have contributed to this. In the past, home drinking has been a relatively under researched topic, and there is now a need to monitor it more going forward to find out whether these home drinking habits picked up by people in 2020 become a new norm within peoples' drinking behaviour. "

The study, "The impact of changes in COVID-19 [lockdown](#) restrictions on alcohol consumption and drinking occasion characteristics in Scotland and England in 2020: an interrupted time-series analysis" is published in *Addiction*.

More information: Iain Hardie et al, The impact of changes in COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on alcohol consumption and drinking occasion characteristics in Scotland and England in 2020: an interrupted time-series analysis, *Addiction* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/add.15794](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.15794)

Provided by University of Sheffield

Citation: Lockdown measures linked to an increase in drinking at home (2022, February 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

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