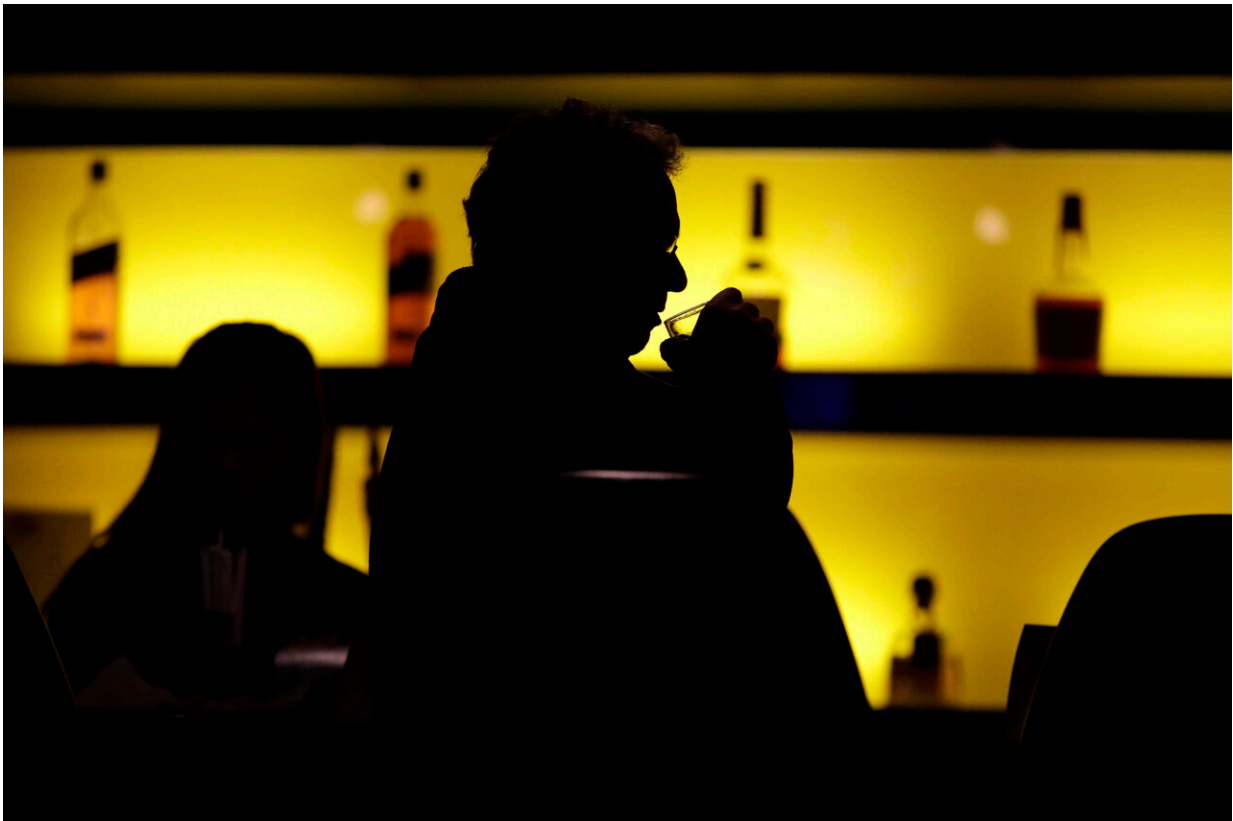


Alcohol death toll is growing, US government reports say

November 4 2022, by Mike Stobbe



In this Nov. 30, 2017 photo, a patron sips his drink while having a meal at a bar in New Jersey. More government data points to alcohol's increasing role in U.S deaths, including a new report that found that the alcohol-induced death rate rose nearly 30% during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Julio Cortez, File

The rate of deaths that can be directly attributed to alcohol rose nearly 30% in the U.S. during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new government data.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had already said the overall number of such deaths rose in 2020 and 2021. Two reports from the CDC this week provided further details on which groups have the highest death rates and which states are seeing the largest numbers.

"Alcohol is often overlooked" as a [public health problem](#), said Marissa Esser, who leads the CDC's alcohol program. "But it is a leading preventable cause of death."

A report released Friday focused on more than a dozen kinds of "alcohol-induced" deaths that were wholly blamed on drinking. Examples include alcohol-caused liver or pancreas failure, [alcohol poisoning](#), withdrawal and certain other diseases. There were more than 52,000 such deaths last year, up from 39,000 in 2019.

The rate of such deaths had been increasing in the two decades before the pandemic, by 7% or less each year.

In 2020, they rose 26%, to about 13 deaths per 100,000 Americans. That's the [highest rate](#) recorded in at least 40 years, said the study's lead author, Merianne Spencer.

Such deaths are 2 1/2 times more common in men than in women, but rose for both in 2020, the study found. The rate continued to be highest for people ages 55 to 64, but rose dramatically for certain other groups, including jumping 42% among women ages 35 to 44.

The second report, published earlier this week in *JAMA Network Open*, looked at a wider range of deaths that could be linked to drinking, such

as [motor vehicle accidents](#), suicides, falls and cancers.

More than 140,000 of that broader category of alcohol-related deaths occur annually, based on data from 2015 to 2019, the researchers said. CDC researchers say about 82,000 of those deaths are from drinking too much over a long period of time and 58,000 from causes tied to acute intoxication.

The study found that as many as 1 in 8 deaths among U.S. adults ages 20 to 64 were alcohol-related deaths. New Mexico was the state with the highest percentage of alcohol-related deaths, 22%. Mississippi had the lowest, 9%

Excessive drinking is associated with chronic dangers such as liver cancer, [high blood pressure](#), stroke and heart disease. Drinking by [pregnant women](#) can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth or birth defects. And [health officials](#) say alcohol is a factor in as many as one-third of serious falls among the elderly.

It's also a risk to others through drunken driving or alcohol-fueled violence. Surveys suggest that more than half the alcohol sold in the U.S. is consumed during binge drinking episodes.

Even before the pandemic, U.S. alcohol consumption was trending up, and Americans were drinking more than when Prohibition was enacted. But deaths may have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began for several reasons, including people with alcohol-related illnesses may have had more trouble getting [medical care](#), Esser said.

She added that the research points to a need to look at steps to reduce alcohol consumption, including increasing [alcohol](#) taxes and enacting measures that limit where people can buy beer, wine and liquor.

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