

Laws aimed at limiting alcohol use associated with lower alcohol consumption by women of reproductive age

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Women aged 18 to 44 living in states that outlaw Sunday liquor sales or driving with a blood alcohol concentration greater than .08 drink less than their counterparts in other states, according to a new study recently published in *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

This is the first study to assess whether state-level general population [alcohol](#) policies are associated with drinking outcomes among women of reproductive age—and the findings suggest they are. Policies that stigmatize and punish alcohol use during pregnancy have increased in recent years. Yet, these types of policies have been shown by prior studies to be associated with poorer birth outcomes and other adverse infant and maternal outcomes.

The study authors recommend that [states](#) shift to policies aimed at limiting drinking in the general population and away from policies that penalize drinking during pregnancy specifically.

For the study, researchers examined self-reported alcohol consumption data collected between 1984 and 2020 from more than 13,000 women aged 18 to 44 from all 50 states and the policies in effect in the states where respondents lived at the time.

Women living in states that had [blood alcohol concentration](#) limits of .05 to .08 had fewer drinks and fewer days where they drank heavily (more than five drinks in one day) compared to women living in states with no blood alcohol concentration limits. These findings are among the first to suggest that blood alcohol concentration limits may influence how much people drink, as other studies have focused on how these laws affect driving.

Women living in states that allowed retail sales of liquor on Sunday drank 1.20 times as many drinks and had more heavy drinking days than women living in states that prohibited off-premises liquor sales on Sunday. Allowing heavy beer in gas stations was also related to more drinks overall. Other state alcohol policies, such as government control of alcohol sales and prohibiting the sale of liquor at gas stations and [grocery stores](#), were not significantly associated with how much women drank.

Data for the study came from the National Alcohol Survey, a nationally representative survey of the United States [adult population](#) conducted approximately every five years in all 50 states. Respondents may underreport past year number of drinks and the number of days where the respondent drank more than five and more than eight drinks. Results should not be considered causal.

Future studies should examine relationships between policies aimed at the [general population](#) and drinking outcomes during pregnancy specifically. Researchers and health care practitioners should also track drinking and [health outcomes](#) in several states that have recently expanded [alcohol sales](#) on Sundays, including Arkansas, Georgia, Ohio, and South Carolina.

More information: Meenakshi S. Subbaraman et al, Associations between state-level general population alcohol policies and drinking outcomes among women of reproductive age: Results from 1984 to 2020 National Alcohol Surveys, *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.15156](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.15156)

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