

2.6 million die annually due to alcohol: WHO

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Alcohol kills nearly three million people annually, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday, adding that while the death rate had dropped slightly in recent years it remained "unacceptably high".

The United Nations health agency's latest report on alcohol and health

said alcohol causes nearly one in 20 deaths globally each year, through drink driving, alcohol-induced violence and abuse, and a multitude of diseases and disorders.

The report said 2.6 million deaths were attributed to [alcohol consumption](#) in 2019—the latest available statistics—accounting for 4.7 percent of all deaths worldwide that year.

Nearly three-quarters of those deaths were in men, it said.

"Substance use severely harms individual health, increasing the risk of chronic diseases, [mental health conditions](#), and tragically resulting in millions of preventable deaths every year," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

He pointed out that there had been "some reduction in alcohol consumption and related harm worldwide since 2010".

"(But) the health and social burden due to alcohol use remains unacceptably high," he continued, highlighting that [younger people](#) were disproportionately affected.

The highest proportion of alcohol-attributable deaths in 2019—13 percent—were among people aged 20 to 39, the WHO said.

Cancer, car crashes

Drinking is linked to a slew of health conditions, including cirrhosis of the liver and some cancers.

Of all fatalities it caused in 2019, the report found that an estimated 1.6 million were from noncommunicable diseases.

Of these, 474,000 were from cardiovascular diseases, 401,000 from cancer and a huge 724,000 from injuries, including traffic accidents and self-harm.

Alcohol abuse also makes people more susceptible to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV and pneumonia, the report found.

An estimated 209 million people lived with [alcohol dependence](#) in 2019—3.7 percent of the global population.

Total per capita consumption worldwide decreased slightly to 5.5 liters of alcohol in 2019 from 5.7 liters nine years earlier, the report found.

But alcohol consumption overall is unevenly distributed around the globe.

Well over half of the world's population over the age of 15 abstains completely.

Europe accounted by far for the highest levels of per capital drinking, at 9.2 liters, followed by the Americas at 7.5 liters.

The lowest consumption was in predominantly Muslim countries in Northern Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the report said.

Heavy drinkers

Among people who drank alcohol in 2019, the report determined they consumed 27 grams of pure alcohol per day on average.

That is roughly equivalent to two glasses of wine, two small bottles of beer or two shots of spirits.

"This level and frequency of drinking is associated with increased risks of numerous health conditions and associated mortality and disability," the WHO warned.

In 2019, a full 38 percent of current drinkers acknowledged having engaged in heavy episodic drinking, defined as consuming at least 60 grams of pure alcohol on one or more occasions in the preceding month.

Globally, 23.5 percent of 15- to 19-year-olds were considered current drinkers.

That jumped to more than 45 percent for people in this age group living in Europe, and to nearly 44 percent in the Americas.

The WHO said it was essential to improve access to quality treatment for [substance use](#) disorders.

In 2019, the proportion of people contacting such treatment services ranged from below one percent to 35 percent in countries providing this data.

"Stigma, discrimination and misconceptions about the efficacy of treatment contribute to these critical gaps in treatment provision," Vladimir Poznyak, head of WHO's unit for alcohol, drugs and addictive behaviors, told reporters.

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