

# Alcohol abuse could kill around 210,000 people over the next 20 years, academic warns

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A University of Southampton academic has warned the UK is on the ‘potential tipping point’ in the war against alcohol abuse and says failure to reform alcohol laws will result in 210,000 avoidable alcohol-related deaths over the next 20 years.

Dr. Nick Sheron, Head of Clinical Hepatology at the University of Southampton, suggests that the government should move from the voluntary “responsibility deal” with alcohol retailers, which encourages them to reduce alcohol consumption, to imposing lawful measures on the drinks industry, such as banning special offers or instituting a minimum price per unit of alcohol.

[Alcohol abuse](#) is rising within the UK and costs the NHS an estimated £2.3billion a year. Alcohol-related liver deaths account for about a quarter of all alcohol-related deaths.

Published in the *Lancet* today Dr. Sheron and colleagues warns the number of alcohol-related deaths over the next 20 years will be determined by “the effectiveness or otherwise of Government alcohol policy”.

However, he writes: “There are welcome signs that the Government might reconsider the evidence-based strategies of increasing price, reducing availability, and preventing marketing of alcohol to children

and young people; most importantly, the Prime Minister recently spoke in support of an effective minimum price per unit.

“The Government will have to withstand powerful lobbying from the drinks industry, but the prize of reversing this tragic toll of alcohol-related deaths is there for the taking.”

Dr. Sheron and his colleagues estimate that there will be around 210,000 avoidable alcohol-related deaths over the following 20 years and have warned that it is becoming an ever increasing problem in younger generations, saying that alcohol is a factor in 26.6 per cent of deaths in men aged 16–24 years.

He believes that the effects of powerful alcohol control policies will have a positive impact on reducing alcohol-related deaths, even though alcohol-related disease may take years to develop.

“It remains entirely within the power of the UK Government to prevent the worst case scenario of avoidable deaths,” Dr. Sheron says. “Effective alcohol policies deliver results quickly, and an effective alcohol strategy implemented now would deliver substantial reductions in mortality within 2 or 3 years.

“We are at a potential tipping point in the UK in taking on the shameful, preventable loss of life caused by alcohol. Can the UK Government afford to duck effective action on alcohol that will have such a positive impact on crime and disorder, work productivity, and health?”

**More information:** To read the comment in the Lancet visit [www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ... \(12\)60244-X/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan... (12)60244-X/fulltext)

Provided by University of Southampton

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