



Statistics on alcohol

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Alcohol misuse is a significant and increasing problem in contemporary society. It is prevalent among young people and seems to be a distinctive characteristic of British drinking culture. Over the last 5 years the Government has reformed licensing laws and implemented a strategy aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm.

This Note presents statistical information on aspects of drinking. The Note examines trends and patterns in drinking among adults and young people. It also includes information on alcohol-related ill health, NHS hospital activity and the cost of alcohol misuse.

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1.1 Introduction

The previous Government's Public Health White Paper *Savings Lives: Our Healthier Nation*, set out the first set of plans to publish a strategy to tackle alcohol misuse. In March 2004 the Government published the *Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England*¹, which contained a series of measures intended to reduce the harm caused by alcohol misuse. This included:

- tackling alcohol-related disorder in town and city centres;
- improving treatment and support for people with alcohol problems;
- clamping down on irresponsible promotions by the industry; and
- providing better information to consumers about the dangers of alcohol misuse.

In November 2004, the White Paper, *Choosing Health*, was published. This contained further proposals on alcohol harm reduction strategies. Proposed measures included:

- a national information campaign to reduce binge drinking
- piloting screening and treatment interventions in primary and secondary healthcare settings
- improvements in treatment services
- improving training of healthcare professionals to allow early recognition of alcohol-related problems.

The previous Government's renewed alcohol strategy, *Safe. Sensible. Social. The next steps in the National Alcohol Strategy*² was published on 5 June 2007, and contains a detailed programme of work to minimise the health harms, violence and antisocial behaviour associated with alcohol, while ensuring that people are able to enjoy alcohol safely and responsibly.

On May 20, 2010 the Government launched The Coalition: Our Programme for Government. The document contained several commitments to tackle the harmful use of alcohol.

These include:

- Banning the sale of alcohol below cost price.
- Reviewing alcohol taxation and pricing to ensure it tackles binge drinking without unfairly penalising responsible drinkers, pubs and important local industries.
- Overhauling the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police much stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse to grant licences to, any premises that are causing problems.
- Allowing councils and the police to shut down permanently any shop or bar found to be persistently selling alcohol to children.
- Doubling the maximum fine for under-age alcohol sales to £20,000.
- Permitting local councils to charge more for late-night licences to pay for additional policing

¹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/caboffice%20alcoholhar.pdf>

² <http://www.ias.org.uk/resources/ukreports/revnational-strategy.pdf>

1.2 Drinking among adults³

Men are more likely to drink than women (68% of men and 54% of women have drunk alcohol during the last week). Men also drink more frequently than women. Almost one in five men (18%) compared with one in ten women (10%) drank on at least five of the preceding seven days.

Young people drink less frequently than older people. 7% of men and 2% of women aged 16-24 had drunk on 5 or more days during the previous week compared with 27% of men and 14% of women aged 65 and over. However, young people are more likely to exceed the daily benchmarks.⁴ Over one third (36%) of men aged 16-24 had drunk more than 4 units on at least one day during the previous week compared with 20% of men aged 65 and over. Among women, 37% of those aged 16-24 had exceeded 3 units on at least one day compared with only 11% of those aged 65 and over.

Binge drinking is commonly perceived as drinking large amounts of alcohol in a relatively short space of time, with a specific intention of getting drunk. The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy defined binge drinking as drinking above double the recommended daily guidelines on at least one occasion in the last week. One fifth (20%) of men drink more than 8 units on at least one day of the week: the proportion ranges from 24% of men aged 16-24 to only 5% of those aged 65 and over. 13% of women drink more than 6 units on at least one day of the week: 24% of those aged 16-24, but just 2% of those aged 65 and over.

The prevalence of binge drinking among young men has fallen since 1998 and in 2009 the proportion of young men binge drinking was equivalent to that for women for the first time.

Prevalence of binge drinking among 16 - 24 year olds: Great Britain, 1998 to 2009



³ ONS, General Lifestyle Survey 2009

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ghs/general-lifestyle-survey/2009-report/drinking.xls>

⁴ Guidelines issued by the Department of Health in 1995 recommend a maximum daily alcohol intake of 3-4 units for men and 2-3 units for women. The strength of an alcoholic drink is indicated by the percentage of alcohol by volume (ABV). A unit corresponds to approximately 8g (or 10ml) of pure alcohol, regardless of the amount of liquid in which it is diluted. For instance, half a pint of beer (ABV 3.5%) or a small glass of wine (ABV 12-14%) is the equivalent of 1 unit.

A review of information on inequalities in health, undertaken by the Department of Health, noted that both mortality and morbidity show a clear association within socio-economic position, with death rates higher among unskilled men than among those in professional households. Some 6,500 deaths a year are thought to be directly attributable to alcohol misuse.⁵ However, those in the non-manual households tend to have higher weekly alcohol consumption.

Variations in alcohol consumption by socio-economic classification and economic activity status reflect differences in both the income and age profiles of the groups. Among men and women aged 16-64, those in professional and managerial households are most likely to have drunk alcohol in the previous week while those in a semi-routine and routine occupations are the least likely. This is also true in the proportions drinking on five days or more in the previous week. A similar pattern is apparent for economic activity status, whereby those working are more likely to drink and binge drink than those who are unemployed and economically inactive.

Drinking last week, by socio-economic classification and economic activity status, Great Britain 2009

	Men	Women	All persons
% w ho drank last w eek			
Managerial and professional	77	65	71
Intermediate	67	55	60
Routine and manual	59	44	51
Total	68	54	61
% w ho drank on 5 or more days last w eek			
Managerial and professional	23	14	18
Intermediate	19	10	14
Routine and manual	14	7	10
Total	18	10	14
% w ho binge drank on at least one day last w eek			
Managerial and professional	23	15	19
Intermediate	20	12	15
Routine and manual	19	11	15
Total	20	13	16
% w ho drank last w eek			
Working	74	64	69
Unemployed	58	44	53
Economically inactive	52	45	48
All adults of working age	69	58	63
% w ho drank on 5 or more days last w eek			
Working	17	10	13
Unemployed	12	7	10
Economically inactive	15	8	10
All adults of working age	16	9	13
% w ho binge drank on at least one day last w eek			
Working	26	18	22
Unemployed	24	17	22
Economically inactive	17	11	13
All adults of working age	24	16	20

Source: ONS, GLS 2009

⁵ NHS Information Centre, Statistics on Alcohol, England 2011

The extent to which drinking habits and alcohol consumption vary in different parts of Great Britain is always of interest. In 2009 men in England were more likely to have drunk on at least five days in the previous week than men living in Scotland (19% compared with 12%) but were not significantly different from men in Wales. A higher proportion (11%) of women in England drank alcohol on five or more days than in either Scotland (8%) or Wales (7%).

Looking at the English regions, the proportion of men binge drinking was highest in the Yorkshire and the Humber (27%) the North East (27%) and the North West (25%) while the proportion was between 16% and 20% in all other regions. These regions also contained the highest proportions of women binge drinking. Overall, the lowest levels of drunk were observed in London and the West Midlands.⁶

1.3 Drinking among young people⁷

In 2010, 13% of children aged 11-15 in England drank alcohol in the last week; the lowest level recorded since a peak of 27% in 1996. This is a similar proportion to 20% in 2007, and down from 27% in 1996. The proportion of pupils in this age group who have never drunk alcohol has risen in recent years, from 39% in 2003 to 55% in 2010.

The proportion of children drinking alcohol increases sharply with age: for example, only 1% of 11 year olds drank in the past week, compared with 30% of those aged 15.

In 2010, the mean amount of alcohol consumed by pupils who had drunk in the last week was 12.9 units. Mean consumption levels have varied between 11.6 units and 14.6 units since 2007, with no clear trend. (The method used to calculate alcohol consumption changed in 2007 and it is not possible to compare 2010 consumption directly with that measured in 2006 and earlier.) Most pupils who drank in the last week had done so on one or two days (56% and 29% respectively). On the days they did drink, more than half (59%) drank more than four units on average.

Pupils are more likely to be given alcohol than to buy it, most commonly by family or friends. However, about half (48%) of pupils who ever drink also said they buy alcohol, despite being well below the age when they can legally do so (18 years old). In 2010, pupils who drank were most likely to buy alcohol from friends or relatives (26%), someone else (16%), an off-licence (16%) or a shop or supermarket (12%).

Pupils' drinking behaviour is influenced by the attitudes and behaviour of their families. They are less likely to drink if their parents disapprove, and more likely to drink if this is tolerated by their parents. More than half (51%) of pupils said their families didn't like them drinking. Almost as many (48%) said their families didn't mind them drinking, as long as they didn't drink too much, with a small proportion (1%) who said their parents let them drink as much as they like. Most pupils (85%) who said that their parents would not like them to drink had never drunk alcohol, compared with 27% of those whose parents don't mind them drinking, as long as they didn't drink too much.

⁶ The relatively low heavy drinking rates in London are at least partly explained by its large ethnic minority population. The Health Survey for England 2004 focused on ethnic minorities and states that the prevalence of drinking alcohol among men and women in minority ethnic groups (other than the Irish) is much lower than the general population.

⁷ National Centre for Social Research, Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England 2010.

Drinking last week, by sex and Government Office Region, Great Britain 2009

Persons aged 16 and over

	Drank last week	Drank on 5 or more days last week	Binge drank on at least one day last week
Men			
North East	75	19	27
North West	71	16	25
Yorkshire and the Humber	70	17	27
East Midlands	70	21	19
West Midlands	66	21	16
East of England	71	20	20
London	57	17	16
South East	73	21	20
South West	75	22	17
England	69	19	20
Wales	66	17	20
Scotland	58	12	20
Great Britain	68	18	20
Women			
North East	57	10	17
North West	56	9	17
Yorkshire and the Humber	60	11	18
East Midlands	56	10	13
West Midlands	52	12	8
East of England	57	13	10
London	46	8	11
South East	59	12	13
South West	54	11	9
England	55	11	13
Wales	52	7	15
Scotland	48	8	14
Great Britain	54	10	13
All persons			
North East	65	14	21
North West	63	12	21
Yorkshire and the Humber	65	14	22
East Midlands	63	15	16
West Midlands	58	16	11
East of England	64	16	15
London	51	12	13
South East	65	16	17
South West	64	16	13
England	62	15	16
Wales	58	12	17
Scotland	53	10	17
Great Britain	61	14	16

Source: ONS, GHS 2009

1.4 Alcohol-related ill-health & NHS hospital activity

Alcohol misuse can be directly linked to deaths from certain types of disease, such as liver cirrhosis, and in some cases it may also be associated with other causes of death, such as stroke. Alcohol misuse is a major cause of attendance and admission to general hospitals in both the A&E/trauma and non-emergency settings. It may be directly responsible for admission or together with other causes contribute to hospital admission. Around 70% of A&E attendances between midnight and 5am on weekend nights are alcohol-related.⁸

There were 68,825 NHS hospital admissions with a primary diagnosis for alcohol-related diseases in England in 2009/10; 69% of those admitted were males.⁹ The number of hospital admissions with a primary diagnosis for alcohol-related diseases has increased by 66% since 1997/98 (41,504 admissions).

The following table shows the number of deaths with an alcohol-related underlying cause of death in England since 2001. Between 2001 and 2008 the number of alcohol-related deaths has increased by 24% (from 5,476 deaths to 6,768). In 2009 the number of deaths fell to 6,584, a 3% reduction.

Alcohol-related deaths^{1,2} by gender, England 2001 to 2009

ICD 10 code ³	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
All persons	5,476	5,582	5,981	6,036	6,191	6,517	6,541	6,768	6,584
F10 Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	484	430	433	462	539	506	484	637	596
I42.6 Alcoholic cardiomyopathy	108	122	99	94	75	83	75	80	98
K70 Alcoholic liver disease	3,236	3,392	3,697	3,759	3,874	4,160	4,249	4,400	4,154
K73 Chronic hepatitis - not elsewhere specified	70	72	58	63	58	68	68	62	70
K74 Fibrosis and cirrhosis of the liver (excluding K74.3-K74.5)	1,406	1,407	1,511	1,466	1,427	1,490	1,432	1,367	1,435
K86.0 Alcoholic induced chronic pancreatitis	33	32	32	43	52	41	48	48	41
X45 Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol	126	112	127	130	151	149	157	153	168
Other causes ³	13	15	24	19	15	20	28	21	22
Men	3,576	3,631	3,970	3,922	4,096	4,272	4,236	4,473	4,316
F10 Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	337	306	320	326	400	349	321	434	424
I42.6 Alcoholic cardiomyopathy	95	93	88	78	59	74	66	68	78
K70 Alcoholic liver disease	2,146	2,275	2,513	2,461	2,602	2,769	2,814	2,966	2,750
K73 Chronic hepatitis - not elsewhere specified	22	16	14	14	12	14	10	16	23
K74 Fibrosis and cirrhosis of the liver (excluding K74.3-K74.5)	858	835	909	904	869	918	865	829	880
K86.0 Alcoholic induced chronic pancreatitis	19	24	22	34	43	33	35	39	29
X45 Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol	90	70	86	91	100	96	106	110	117
Other causes ³	9	12	18	14	11	19	19	11	15
Women	1,900	1,951	2,011	2,114	2,095	2,245	2,305	2,295	2,268
F10 Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	147	124	113	136	139	157	163	203	172
I42.6 Alcoholic cardiomyopathy	13	29	11	16	16	9	9	12	20
K70 Alcoholic liver disease	1,090	1,117	1,184	1,298	1,272	1,391	1,435	1,434	1,404
K73 Chronic hepatitis - not elsewhere specified	48	56	44	49	46	54	58	46	47
K74 Fibrosis and cirrhosis of the liver (excluding K74.3-K74.5)	548	572	602	562	558	572	567	538	555
K86.0 Alcoholic induced chronic pancreatitis	14	8	10	9	9	8	13	9	12
X45 Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol	36	42	41	39	51	53	51	43	51
Other causes ³	4	3	6	5	4	1	9	10	7

1. Deaths occurring in each calendar year.

2. Data may include non-residents.

3. Some causes linked to alcohol consumption as defined by ONS resulted in a small number of deaths per year (less than ten). These have been grouped

Source:

DH2 Mortality Statistics - Cause, No.s 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and Mortality statistics: Deaths registered in 2006 to 2009, Office for National Statistics.

⁸ Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England (2004)

<http://www.strategy.gov.uk/downloads/su/alcohol/pdf/CabOffice%20AlcoholHar.pdf>

⁹ NHS Hospital Episode Statistics online 2009/10

<http://www.hesonline.nhs.uk/Ease/servlet/ContentServer?siteID=1937&categoryID=214>

1.5 Drinking and driving¹⁰

In 2010, around 5% of all road casualties and 14% of road deaths happened when someone was driving while over the legal limit for alcohol. In 2010, there were 9,700 road casualties involving illegal alcohol levels in Great Britain, resulting in 250 deaths. In addition, around 1,230 people were seriously injured in drink-drive accidents in 2010. Two-thirds of all casualties in drink-related accidents are men and those aged under 30 have the most alcohol-related road accidents.

Estimates of casualties involving illegal alcohol levels by severity of casualty Great Britain, 1997 - 2010

	Total of all casualties	Total casualties involving illegal alcohol levels	<i>number of casualties</i>		
			Severity of casualty		
			Fatal	Serious	Slight
1997	327,803	16,800	550	2,940	13,310
1998	325,212	15,590	460	2,520	12,610
1999	320,310	16,910	460	2,470	13,980
2000	320,283	18,060	530	2,540	14,990
2001	313,309	18,780	530	2,700	15,550
2002	302,605	20,100	550	2,790	16,760
2003	290,607	18,990	580	2,590	15,820
2004	280,840	16,980	580	2,340	14,060
2005	271,017	15,400	550	2,090	12,760
2006	258,404	14,370	560	1,970	11,840
2007	247,780	14,020	410	1,760	11,850
2008	230,905	12,980	400	1,620	10,960
2009	222,146	12,030	380	1,480	10,130
2010	208,648	9,700	250	1,230	8,220

Source: Department for Transport, Road Casualties Great Britain 2010 - Annual Report

¹⁰ Department for Transport, Road Casualties Great Britain 2009 - Annual Report
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/excel/173025/221412/221549/227755/503336/RCGB2009Article3.xls>