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## Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health

**Attention:** Hospitals, Family Health Teams, Midwives, Nurse Practitioners, Physicians, Pharmacies, Beausoleil First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Rama First Nation, Wahta First Nation, Ontario Health Central Region

**Date:** January 31, 2023

On January 17, 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) released [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#), to replace the Canadian Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines issued in 2011. The new guidance summarizes the evidence drawn from evidence reviews, mathematical modelling, consultations and discussions. It is intended to provide Canadians with accurate and current information about the risk of harms associated with the consumption of alcohol so they can make informed decisions about their alcohol consumption. The evidence base regarding alcohol and health has progressed substantially since the 2011 guidelines, leading to major changes in the guidance and a focus on a harm reduction approach. There is overwhelming evidence to confirm that when it comes to drinking alcohol, less consumption means less risk of health and social harm from alcohol.

### Key Messages:

**Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health**

To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol, **it is recommended that people living in Canada consider reducing their alcohol use.**

The reasons to do so derive from the following facts:

- a. There is a continuum of risk associated with weekly alcohol consumption where the risk of harm from alcohol is:
  - **Low** for individuals who consume **2** standard drinks or less per week;
  - **Moderate** for those who consume between **3 and 6** standard drinks per week; and
  - **Increasingly high** for those who consume **7** standard drinks or more per week.
- b. Consuming more than **2** standard drinks per drinking occasion is associated with an increased risk of harms to self and others, including injuries and violence.
- c. When pregnant or trying to get pregnant, there is no known safe amount of alcohol use.
- d. When breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest.

**Sex and Gender**

Above the upper limit of the moderate risk zone for alcohol consumption, the health risks increase more steeply for females than males.

Far more injuries, violence and deaths result from men's alcohol use, especially in the case of per occasion drinking.



- For youth, it is recommended to delay consuming alcohol for as long as possible. Alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used by youth. Binge drinking places the youth at a higher risk for injuries, aggression, violence, and other consequences such as dating violence and worsening academic performance. In addition, even for the same number of drinks consumed per drinking occasion, the risk of adverse outcomes from alcohol consumption is greater for youth than for adults.

### Rationale for the New Guidance

- Alcohol is a carcinogen which is known to cause at least seven different types of cancer including most commonly breast and colon (highest absolute risk), followed by cancers of the rectum, mouth and throat, liver, esophagus and larynx.
- For many years, the commonly held belief was that drinking in moderation offered protection against coronary artery disease. Research in the last decade is more nuanced with the most recent and highest quality systematic reviews showing that drinking a little alcohol neither decreases nor increases the risk of ischemic heart disease, but it is a risk factor for most other types of cardiovascular disease, including, hypertension, heart failure, high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation and hemorrhagic stroke.
- Alcohol consumption is also a risk factor for liver disease, as well as for violent and aggressive behaviour.
- The latest research shows that there are no health benefits from drinking alcohol, and reducing alcohol consumption by any amount is beneficial. Individuals in the highest risk level (someone who drinks 7 or more standard drinks per week) will benefit from any reduction in alcohol consumption. No matter where you are on the continuum, for your health, less alcohol is better.

### Simcoe Muskoka Data

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) in 2019/20, 20% of adults ages 19 years and older reported drinking at a high-risk level (7+ drinks) in the past week. This was significantly higher than the comparable provincial average of 15%.

Nationally, [Statistics Canada](#) reports that alcohol-induced deaths increased significantly during the pandemic, with an 18% increase from 2019 to 2020 and a continuation of the 2020 rates into 2021.

For more information about the risks associated with alcohol consumption please visit Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction <https://www.ccsa.ca/alcohol> and refer to [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health for a Public Summary](#).

You can also speak with a public health professional by calling Health Connection, 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.