

Most alcohol-linked deaths occur among working-age adults, CDC says

March 13 2014, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



States lose thousands of people in their prime years, report finds.

(HealthDay)—Americans' excessive alcohol use contributes to thousands of deaths each year, and the majority who die are working-age adults, according to a new government report.

More than two-thirds of these deaths and 80 percent of years of life lost come from the ranks of adults aged 20 to 64, said lead author Katy Gonzales, an [alcohol](#) epidemiologist with the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"It's really important to drive home that excessive alcohol use is a leading cause of preventable [death](#)," Gonzales said. "It really is right up there with tobacco and physical inactivity, especially among working-age adults."

The state-specific report, released Thursday by the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, found that, in the 11 states studied, alcohol caused a median of 1,650 deaths each year between 2006 and 2010. This equated to a median of 43,000 potential years of life lost, the researchers said.

The study used death-certificate and alcohol-consumption data from 11 states—California, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin, according to the CDC's March 14 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Researchers ran the data through a computer model, using a list of 54 alcohol-related problems to calculate how drinking had contributed in general to these deaths, Gonzales said.

Accidental causes such as car crashes, firearm injuries, drownings, hypothermia and occupational injuries were included, as well as illnesses such as [liver disease](#), cancer, stroke, pancreatitis, high [blood pressure](#) and [fetal alcohol syndrome](#).

Men were significantly more likely to die of drinking-related causes than women.

In making its calculations, the model took into account diseases in which alcohol is a direct cause, such as [alcoholic liver disease](#), as well as diseases in which alcohol serves as a contributing factor, such as high blood pressure or stroke.

New Mexico had the highest death rate from excessive drinking of the 11 states studied—about 51 alcohol-related deaths per 100,000 residents. Utah had the lowest, with 22.4 alcohol-related deaths per 100,000.

The most total alcohol-related deaths occurred among whites. Blacks,

American Indians and Alaska natives, however, tended to have higher death rates linked to [excessive drinking](#) than other groups, the researchers found.

This is likely because poverty drives addiction, said Janina Kean, president and CEO of High Watch Recovery Center, a drug-rehab facility in Kent, Conn.

"There's more exposure to drugs and alcohol in the impoverished way that minorities in our country have had to exist," Kean said.

Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, agreed with the researchers' conclusion that community-driven strategies are needed to reduce deaths caused in whole or part by alcohol.

"[These strategies include] holding retailers liable for injury or death related to alcohol sold to intoxicated persons and minors," he said. Glatter said he also supports steeply increasing the price of alcohol and significantly reducing the number of licenses issued to sell alcoholic beverages.

The United States also needs to confront the stigma it has regarding addiction, Kean said. Only 11 percent of people with an addictive disorder get treatment, compared with 77 percent of people with [high blood pressure](#) and 73 percent of people with diabetes, she said.

"We don't seem to understand that addiction is a brain disease," Kean said. "We don't blame people with diabetes or heart disease or cancer, but we seem to think people suffering from addiction have chosen to do what they do."

More information: For more information on alcohol abuse, visit the

[U.S. National Institutes of Health.](#)

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Citation: Most alcohol-linked deaths occur among working-age adults, CDC says (2014, March 13) retrieved 16 January 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-alcohol-linked-deaths-working-age-adults-cdc.html>

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