

Alcohol abuse kills three million people a year, most of them men – WHO report

More one in 20 deaths in 2016 – 3 million people, mostly men – were caused by harmful use of [alcohol](#), according a report released on Friday by the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

“Far too many people, their families and communities suffer the consequences of the harmful use of alcohol through violence, injuries, mental health problems and diseases like cancer and stroke,” said [Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), WHO’s Director-General, adding that “it’s time to step up action to prevent this serious threat to the development of healthy societies.”

WHO’s [Global status report on alcohol and health 2018](#) reveals that of all deaths attributable to alcohol, 28 per cent were caused by injuries (from traffic accidents, self-harm and violence); 21 per cent were due to digestive disorders; and the remainder were caused by cardiovascular diseases, infectious diseases, cancers, mental disorders and other health conditions.

Despite a reduction in heavy episodic drinking and the number of alcohol-related deaths since 2010, WHO says the figures of disease and injuries caused by alcohol remain “unacceptably high,” particularly in Europe and the Americas.

Currently, about 2.3 billion people drink an average of 33 grams of pure alcohol a day, roughly equivalent to two glasses (each of 150 ml) of wine, a large (750 ml) bottle of beer or two shots (each of 40 ml) of spirits. Europe has the highest per capita consumption – and [global consumption](#) is predicted to increase in the next decade, especially in South-East Asia, the Western Pacific and the Americas.

The report shows that some 237 million men and 46 million women are suffering from alcohol-use disorders and that these disorders are more common in high-income countries. School surveys indicate that, in many countries, alcohol use starts before the age of 15 with very small differences between boys and girls.

“All countries can do much more to reduce the health and social costs of the harmful use of alcohol,” said Dr. Vladimir Poznyak, Coordinator of WHO’s [Management of Substance Abuse](#) unit. “Proven, cost-effective actions include increasing taxes on alcoholic drinks, bans or restrictions on alcohol advertising, and restricting the physical availability of alcohol.”

The report shows that although almost all (95 per cent) countries have alcohol taxes, fewer than half of them use other price strategies such as banning below-cost selling or volume discounts. In addition, while many

countries have bans on advertising on television and radio, the restrictions are rare when it comes to the internet and social media advertising.

“We would like to see Member States implement creative solutions that will save lives,” Dr. Tedros said. “We must do more to cut demand and reach the target set by governments of a 10 per cent relative reduction in consumption of alcohol globally between 2010 and 2025,” in line with [Target 3.5](#) of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

WHO stressed that reducing the harmful use of alcohol will also help achieve several other health-related SDG targets, including for maternal and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, mental health, injuries and poisonings.