

Alcohol-Related Harm in the United States



Alcohol causes more harm than any other drug in the United States.¹ Alcohol-related harm goes far beyond just drunk driving or underage drinking. Alcohol use contributes to a wide range of societal and personal consequences.

In the United States:

- Alcohol is the third leading cause of preventable death.²
- In 2000, 85,000 deaths were attributable to alcohol consumption.²
- Approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die annually from injuries caused by drinking alcohol.³
- Alcohol contributes to various illnesses such as hypertension, liver cirrhosis, chronic pancreatitis, and cancers of the breast, esophagus, and larynx.⁴
- Alcohol contributes to a wide range of injuries, including motor vehicle crashes, fires, falls, drownings, and unintentional firearm injuries.⁵
- Alcohol plays a role in violent crimes such as homicides, sexual assaults, domestic violence, and child abuse.⁶
- Alcohol contributes to maternal and perinatal conditions such as low birth weight, cognitive deficiencies, and fetal alcohol disorders.⁷
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people under the age of 35; alcohol is involved in more than half of these fatal crashes.⁸
- In 2005 alone, there were more than 1.6 million hospitalizations and 4 million emergency room visits for alcohol-related conditions.⁹
- The economic costs of alcohol are estimated to have been \$220 billion in 2005.¹⁰
- The healthcare costs from alcohol-related problems amount to more than \$26 billion annually. That's \$686 for every person living in the U.S.¹¹

Bottom Line: Far from a benign substance, alcohol use, even at moderate levels, can cause a wide variety of harm, the scope of which goes largely unrecognized by the general public and policymakers alike.

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