

Excessive drinking remains a huge public health issue

By ACSH Staff — July 8, 2014



Binge drinking among adolescents has [long been](#) ^[1] on the

radar as a public health concern. However, it is also a concern for working age adults. A [new study](#) ^[2] from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that excessive drinking accounts for about one in ten deaths among working age adults, and it is the fourth leading cause of preventable death in the United States. The first three are smoking, poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Researchers from the CDC used the Alcohol-Related Disease Impact application to analyze alcohol-related deaths and years of potential life lost due to excessive alcohol consumption. Excessive alcohol consumption was defined as binge drinking (five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women), heavy weekly alcohol consumption (fifteen or more drinks for men and eight or more drinks for women) and any drinking by pregnant women or those under 21 years of age. According to the survey, one in six adults ages 20 to 65 reported binge drinking at least four times per month. Alcohol-related deaths included car accidents, alcohol poisoning, and liver and heart disease, among others. From 2006 to 2010, researchers reported an annual average of almost 90,000 alcohol-attributable deaths among working-age adults and 2.5 million years of potential life lost. These numbers are similar to those numbers reported [according to](#) ^[3] research done in 2001.

The authors noted some limitations of the study, mainly that the survey used relied on self-reported data. Individuals tend to underreport their alcohol consumption and therefore, numbers of adults who actually drink excessively may very well be higher than the number reported.

[According to](#) ^[4] Robert D. Brewer, a co-author of the paper and the director of the alcohol program at the CDC, It s [excessive drinking] is a huge public health problem any way you slice it. There are things that we can do about it, like raising the alcohol tax and encouraging doctors to talk to their patients about alcohol abuse, but a lot of those strategies tend to be underused.

ACSH s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan adds, The fact that these numbers have not changed since 2001 highlights the need for more effective interventions to target those individuals who are excessive drinkers or who are at risk to become excessive drinkers so that we can get these numbers down. Physicians should make more of an effort to talk to their patients about alcohol use so that

individuals can get the help they need.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava added this: While excessive and certainly binge drinking not to mention driving under the influence are clearly health threats, it should be noted that the occasional or even daily consumption of [alcohol in moderation](#) [5] has been shown to have health benefits, especially in terms of reducing the toll of heart disease. Again, it's the dose that makes the poison.

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Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/2013/09/binge-drinking-among-adolescents-a-public-health-concern/>

[2] http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2014/13_0293.htm

[3] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15385917>

[4] <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/07/07/alcohol-remains-a-leading-killer/?ref=todayspaper>

[5] <http://acsh.org/1999/02/moderate-alcohol-consumption-and-health/>