SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ALCOHOL AND SOCIETY 2016

Alcohol and cancer

AUTHORS

Sven Andreasson
Karolinska Institutet, Department of Public Health Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden

Tanya Chikritzhs
Curtin University, National Drug Research Institute, Perth, Australia

Frida Dangardt
Sahlgrenska Academy and University Hospital, The Queen Silvia Children´s Hospital – Paediatric Clinical Physiology, Gothenburg, Sweden

Harold Holder
Senior Scientist Emeritus and former Director of Prevention Research Center, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Berkely, CA, USA

Timothy Naimi
Boston Medical Center, Section on General Internal Medicine, Boston, MA, USA

Tim Stockwell
Dept of Psychology – Centre for Addictions Research of BC, University of Victoria, BC, Canada

Executive summary

- Alcohol causes cancer. Any alcohol consumption increasesthe risk of certain cancers, and higher levels of consumption further increase those risks.
- Evidence for the relationship between alcohol and cancer comes from chemical toxicology studies, animal studies, and epidemiological studies among humans. Alcohol is considered a Group I carcinogen (highest level) by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization.
- Human cancers that are considered causally related to alcohol consumption include cancers of the oral cavity (mouth), pharynx (throat), larynx (voice box), esophagus, stomach, liver, colon and rectum, and female breast. Other cancers that are associated with alcohol consumption and are probably causally related to alcohol include cancers of the pancreas and prostate. There are other cancers that are associated with alcohol consumption (e.g., lung cancer, melanoma) but where a causal relationship is more speculative in nature.
- In Sweden in 2014, there were an estimated 996 alcohol-attributable cancer deaths (4.5% of all cancer deaths) among the 10 cancers listed above. This includes 795 alcohol-attributable cancer deaths (3.6% of cancer deaths) from the eight for the cancers where evidence for a causal relationship with alcohol is considered to have the highest level of evidence.
- The leading causes of alcohol-attributable cancer deaths in Sweden are colorectal cancer for the entire population and among men, and breast cancer among women
- More than 10% of breast cancer deaths in Sweden are attributable to alcohol.
- Critically, the evidence summarised in this report indicates that approximately 30% of all alcohol-attributable cancer cases and deaths in Sweden are caused by moderate or low levels of alcohol consumption.
- The number of alcohol-attributable cancer deaths in Sweden has increased by 7.3 percent since 2001

- Hospitalizations from alcohol-attributable cancers cost at least 324 million SEK in 2014
- The public and members of the medical professions are largely unaware of the role of alcohol as a cause of cancer. Among the general public in European Union nations, Swedes had the lowest recognition of the relationship between alcohol and cancer in a recent study.
- A number of steps should be taken to raise public awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and cancer, including the labeling of alcohol containers with warnings about the risk of specific cancers.
- Population-level reductions in excessive and overall alcohol consumption are the best way to prevent future alcohol-related cancers. The most effective means to achieve this is by adopting and strengthening evidence-based alcohol policies, including maintaining and strengthening the Swedish retail alcohol monopoly, limiting overall access to alcohol, and raising alcohol prices.

Read and download the full report:

https://www.iogt.se/vad-vi-gor/forskning-och-samverkan/forskningsrapporter/alkohol-och-cancer/

