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## Latest global data on cancer burden and alcohol consumption: More than 740 000 new cases of cancer in 2020 attributed to alcohol

**Lyon, France, 14 July 2021** – A new study led by scientists from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) shows that an estimated 741 000 new cases of cancer in 2020 were associated with alcohol consumption globally. These latest data, published in *The Lancet Oncology*,<sup>1</sup> indicate that although risky and heavy drinking patterns (more than two alcoholic drinks per day) represented the largest cancer burden (86% of the total alcohol-attributable cases), light to moderate drinking (up to two alcoholic drinks per day) represented 1 in 7 alcohol-attributable cases and accounted for more than 100 000 new cancer cases worldwide.

“These estimates provide an insight into the global burden of cancer attributable to alcohol consumption according to sex, cancer site, and country or world region,” says Ms Harriet Runggay, a researcher at IARC and the lead author of the article. “We also quantified the proportion of new cancer cases associated with various levels of alcohol consumption and showed that even light to moderate drinking has a significant impact on the burden of cancer.”

### Key results

Men accounted for about three quarters of the total alcohol-attributable cancer cases (567 000 cases).

Alcohol consumption increases the risk of cancers at seven sites: the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus (squamous cell carcinoma), colorectum, liver (hepatocellular carcinoma), and female breast. The cancer types with the largest numbers of new cases in 2020 associated with alcohol consumption were oesophageal cancer (190 000 cases), liver cancer (155 000 cases), and female breast cancer (98 000 cases).

The proportions of new cancer cases that could have been avoided if no one in the population consumed alcohol, or the population attributable fractions (PAFs) for alcohol consumption, were lowest in Northern Africa and Western Asia (less than 1%) in both sexes, and highest in men in Eastern Asia (9%) and Central and Eastern Europe (8%), and in women in Central and Eastern Europe (3%), Australia and New Zealand (3%), and Western Europe (3%).

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<sup>1</sup> Runggay H, Shield K, Charvat H, Ferrari P, Sornpaisarn B, Obot I, et al. Global burden of cancer in 2020 attributable to alcohol consumption: a population-based study. *Lancet Oncol*. Published online 14 July 2021. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045\(21\)00279-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(21)00279-5)

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“Alcohol consumption causes a substantial burden of cancer globally,” says Dr Isabelle Soerjomataram, Deputy Head of the Cancer Surveillance Branch at IARC. “Yet the impact on cancers is often unknown or overlooked. This highlights the need for implementation of effective policy and interventions to increase public awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and cancer risk, and to decrease overall alcohol consumption to prevent the burden of alcohol-attributable cancers.”

### Note to the Editor

All the results of this study are available on the new Cancers Attributable to Alcohol website, accessible at <https://gco.iarc.fr/causes/alcohol>, which is part of the Cancer Causes subsite of the IARC Global Cancer Observatory. The database has user-friendly facilities to produce maps and explore visualizations of the global burden of cancer attributable to alcohol consumption by sex, cancer site, and country or world region.

### For more information, please contact

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