

Alcohol and Cancer

Key Messages from the
Nova Scotia Alcohol Policy Coalition

1 Alcohol causes preventable cancer.

Alcohol is a carcinogen (1) and consuming it increases the risk of developing cancer of the mouth, neck, breast, stomach, liver, pancreas, and colon (2-4). No amount of alcohol consumption is safe, and as alcohol consumption increases so does the risk of cancer (2,4,6). In 2020, 4.1 % of all new cases of cancer globally were attributable to alcohol consumption (7).

3 Consumers and the public deserve to know the risks.

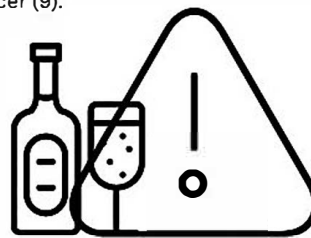
Alcohol was listed as a carcinogen in 1988 (10), and 33 years later, not every Nova Scotian knows that. In Nova Scotia alcohol is a highly normalized drug and heavily commercialized in our communities. The alcohol industry is focused on increasing their market and profits and their values and actions contradict population health, wellness, and safety. It is important that public institutions (ie. government) regulate the alcohol industry by ensuring warning labels are included on all alcohol products so every Nova Scotian who consumes it is aware that alcohol causes preventable cancer (11).

5 Canada's New Guidance on Alcohol and Health helps inform lower risk consumption.

Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health has replaced Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (14). It provides people with accurate and current information about the risks and harms associated with alcohol use. All levels of alcohol consumption are associated with risk, so drinking less is better for everyone. Alcohol causes nearly 7,000 cases of cancer deaths each year in Canada. The Canadian Cancer Society states that drinking less alcohol, or none at all, is among the top 10 healthy habits to prevent cancer (14).

2 Alcohol (ethanol) is a carcinogen and damages DNA.

The main carcinogenic component of alcohol is ethanol, which is contained in every type of alcoholic drink (8). Ethanol damages cells in a way that makes them more prone to becoming malignant (cancerous) (8). It also affects hormones; stimulating cell proliferation and increasing the risk of cancers; most commonly causing breast cancer and colon cancer (9).



4 Warning labels inform consumers and reduce alcohol-related harms.

Alcohol container warning labels are a low-cost strategy to increase consumer knowledge of the risks of alcohol consumption and relative cancer risk. The World Health Organization asserts that it is an obligation of public institutions to ensure consumers are able to make informed decisions about products they purchase (8). Warning labels are most effective when the message is clearly visible, larger in size, includes pictorial health warnings, uses direct language, and incorporates plain packaging principles (11,12,14).

Sources

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