

Alcohol Use Patterns and Health Impacts in Idaho

Summer

2025

June 2025



Epidemiological Brief: Alcohol Use Patterns and Health Impacts in Idaho



PURPOSE

This epidemiological brief aims to explore trends in Idahoans' alcohol consumption and subsequent health outcomes, using state-level data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), emergency medical services (EMS), emergency departments, traffic accidents, vital records, and the Idaho Pregnancy Risk Assessment Tracking System (PRATS).

WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Alcohol and alcoholic beverages contain ethanol, a psychoactive and toxic substance with dependence-producing properties that acts as a central nervous system depressant, affecting nearly every organ in the body.¹ Ethanol is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream, where it begins to take effect almost immediately. Once in the bloodstream, alcohol is metabolized by the liver, which can only process a small amount at a time. Excess alcohol that the liver cannot process remains in the bloodstream, contributing to an individual's blood alcohol concentration (BAC), which in turn influences the acute effects of alcohol, such as impaired coordination, altered judgment, and euphoria.²

LONG-TERM HEALTH RISKS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

In addition to its short-term effects on the body, alcohol can also lead to long-term health problems, including an increased risk of cancer, chronic disease, and death.

Alcoholic beverages have been classified as a Group 1 Carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer since 2009.³ In January 2025, the U.S. Surgeon General released an advisory on alcohol and cancer risk, highlighting alcohol as the leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States.⁴

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that alcohol consumption increases the risk of seven types of cancer: mouth, throat (pharynx), voice box (larynx), esophagus, bowel, liver, and breast cancer.⁵ Even low levels of alcohol consumption can increase cancer risk, with the risk rising as alcohol intake increases.⁶

Excessive alcohol use can increase the risk of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart and liver disease, and alcohol use disorder.⁷ The CDC estimates that approximately 178,000 deaths in the United States each year are attributable to excessive alcohol use.⁸

EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE INCLUDES:

- Binge drinking (4 or more drinks on one occasion for females, 5 or more for males)
- Heavy drinking (8 or more drinks in one week for females, 15 or more for males)
- Any alcohol use by people younger than 21
- Any alcohol use during pregnancy⁷

Despite the extensive body of scientific research on the harms of alcohol consumption and the demonstrated link to cancer, chronic disease, and death, alcohol use is widespread – an estimated 52% of the U.S. population aged 18 and older consumed alcohol in the past month in 2023.⁹

State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW)

Purpose

The purpose of the Idaho SEOW is to promote the strategic use and dissemination of mental health and substance use disorders prevention and intervention data. The SEOW informs Idaho's stakeholders in behavioral health policy, program development, decision-making, resource allocation, and capacity building.

Represented Agencies

- Bureau of Community and Environmental Health, Dept. of Health and Welfare
- Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics, Division of Public Health, Dept. of Health and Welfare
- Division of Behavioral Health, Dept. of Health and Welfare
- Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Welfare
- Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections
- Idaho Department of Correction
- Idaho Office of Drug Policy
- Idaho Statistical Analysis Center, Idaho State Police
- Idaho Supreme Court

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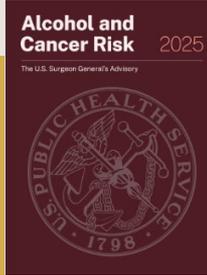
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Introduction

01. U.S. Surgeon General

In January of 2025, the U.S. Surgeon General highlighted that alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States.



02. WHO/CDC

Alcohol increases the risk of mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, bowel, liver, and breast cancer and can also increase risk of chronic disease such as high blood pressure, heart and liver disease, and alcohol use disorder. **The WHO has reported that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption.**

03. U.S. Mortality

The CDC estimates that approximately 178,000 deaths in the United States each year are attributable to excessive alcohol use.

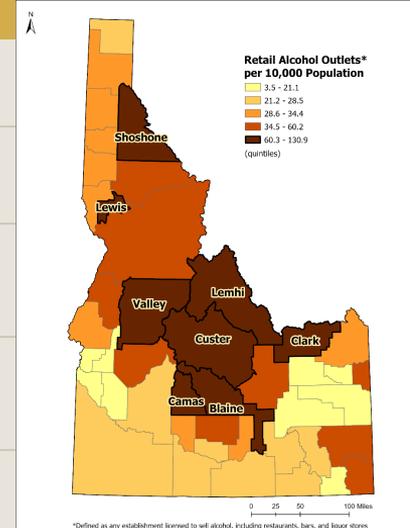
Access

01. State Laws

- Beverages containing more than 16% ABV can only be sold by a state -controlled liquor store.
- Limitations on the days/times alcohol can be sold, may vary by county.
- Excise taxes increase the cost of alcohol and vary based on the type of beverage and its alcohol concentration.

02. Retail Outlets

- There are more than 4,100 alcohol retail outlets across Idaho (as of 2023).
- Shoshone, Lewis, Valley, Lemhi, Custer, Clark, Camas, and Blaine counties have the highest rates of outlets per 10,000 population, these counties also had the most gallons of alcohol sold per population in the same year (2022).
- Outlets may not be within 300 feet of a school.

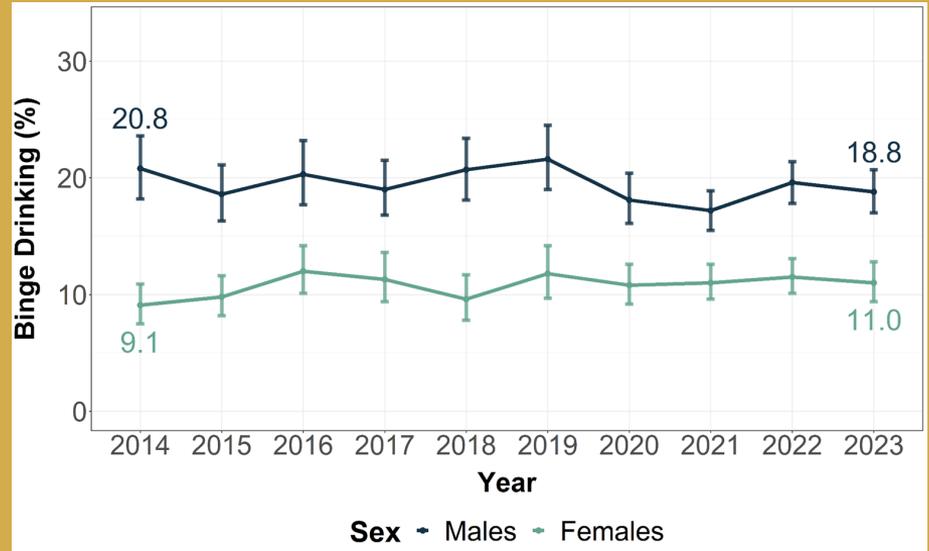


Alcohol Use Trends

(Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)

Past Month & Binge Drinking

- In 2023, an estimated 47.3% of Idaho adults had consumed alcohol in the past month (52.6% of males and 42.1% of females).
- In 2023, approximately 14.8% of Idaho adults engaged in binge drinking (18.8% of males and 11.0% of females).



Binge Drinking: Males consuming 5+ drinks on one occasion; females consuming 4+ drinks on one occasion

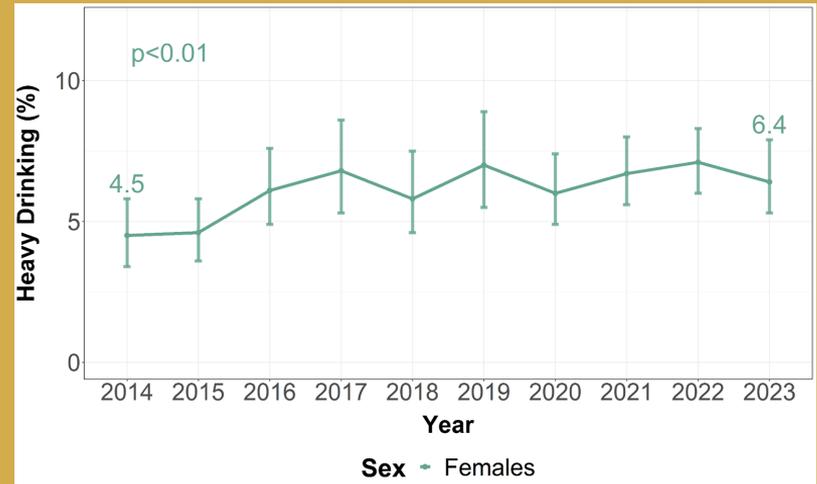
Alcohol Use Trends

(Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)

Heavy Drinking

Approximately 5.9% of Idahoans drank heavily in 2023 (5.2% of males and 6.4% of females).

FINDINGS: A statistically significant trend in the prevalence of heavy drinking among females occurred from 2014 to 2023. An estimated 6.4% of females drank heavily in 2023, a 42% increase from 2014 (4.5%). (No significant trends were identified among men)



Heavy Drinking: Males consuming > 60 drinks and females consuming >30 drinks in the past 30 days.

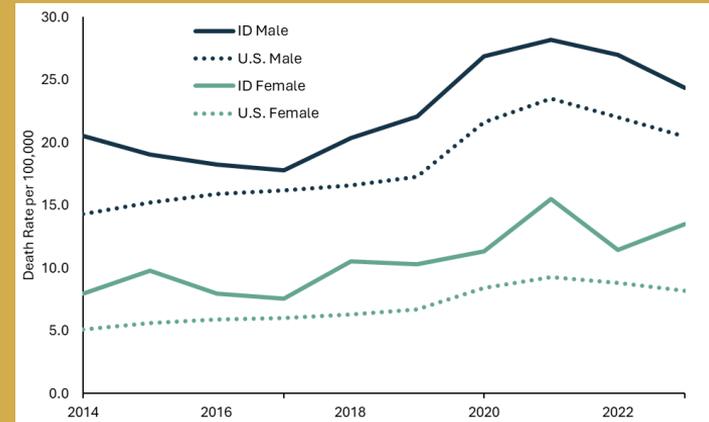
Mortality

(Idaho Bureau of Vital records and Health Statistics)

01. Alcohol-Induced Mortality

From 2014 to 2023, the number of alcohol-induced deaths in Idaho increased by 33%, with female rates rising by 70% and male rates increasing by 19% during this period.

Males and females between the ages of 55 and 64 experienced the largest increases in alcohol-induced deaths from 2014 to 2023. During these ten years, the rate of alcohol-induced deaths among females in this age group rose by 68%, while the rate for males increased by approximately 26%.



02. Alcohol-Related Mortality

The annual ARDI estimates for Idaho show an average of 982 alcohol-attributable deaths per year—more than 2.5 times the average number of alcohol-induced deaths recorded in the state's vital records system during the same period.

Alcohol Mortality & Use Trends in Context:

Alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer - In 2019, an estimated 96,730 cancer cases were related to alcohol consumption including 42,400 in men and 54,330 in women in the U.S.

SOURCE: Office of the Surgeon General (US). *Alcohol and Cancer Risk: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services; 2025.

While regular alcohol consumption can harm both males and females, females are at greater risk of negative health outcomes—such as liver damage, heart disease, brain damage, and breast cancer—even when consuming similar amounts of alcohol as males.

SOURCE: Guy J, Peters MG. *Liver disease in women: the influence of gender on epidemiology, natural history, and patient outcomes*. *Gastroenterol Hepatol*. 2013;9(10):633-639.

SOURCE: Hommer DW. *Male and female sensitivity to alcohol-induced brain damage*. *Alcohol Res Health*. 2003;27(2):181-5.

Research indicates that gender differences in risky drinking behaviors are narrowing among adults aged 26–34 and 45–64, largely due to increases in women's alcohol consumption.

SOURCE: Keyes KM, Jager J, Mal-Sarkar T, Patrick ME, Rutherford C, Hasin D. *Is There a Recent Epidemic of Women's Drinking? A Critical Review of National Studies*. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res*. 2019 Jul;43(7):1344-1359. doi: 10.1111/acer.14082.

Maternal and Infant Health

(Idaho's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Tracking System)

01. Unintended Pregnancy

Research indicates that pregnant people are most likely to drink during the first trimester of pregnancy, likely because many people are unaware that they are pregnant at that time. Among mothers of intended pregnancies in Idaho, 47.3% reported drinking in the three months before becoming pregnant compared to 60.2% of mothers with unintended pregnancies.

02. Sociodemographic Characteristics

Idahoan mothers who drank in the third trimester of pregnancy were more likely to: (1) smoke during the third trimester; (2) have a college education; (3) have an annual household income of \$50k or more; (4) be older; (5) have a lower number of previous births, and; (6) have an unintended pregnancy.

Maternal Data in Context:

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been identified as the leading preventable cause of developmental disabilities and birth defects in the United States, underscoring the critical need to prioritize education, screening, and intervention.

SOURCE: Dejong K, Olyaei A, Lo JO. *Alcohol Use in Pregnancy*. Clin Obstet Gynecol. 2019 Mar;62(1):142-155. doi: 10.1097/GRF.0000000000000414

CDC warns that alcohol use during pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage, preterm birth, stillbirth, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control (CDC). *About Alcohol Use During Pregnancy*. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol-pregnancy/about/>. Published on May 16, 2024.

Current Events

01. U.S. Guidelines & Cancer Risk

The 2025 Surgeon General report states that consuming two drinks a day would result in about five more women out of 100 developing cancer and three more men out of 100.

02. Surgeon General Call to Action

The novel aspect of the Surgeon General Advisory was its conclusion and call for action. **The advisory recommended that health warning labels should be updated on alcoholic beverages** as the next important step for the prevention of alcohol-attributable cancer.

Breaking!



Limit Alcoholic Beverages

- + Consume less alcohol for better overall health.
- + People who should completely avoid alcohol include pregnant women, people who are recovering from alcohol use disorder or are unable to control the

amount they drink, and people taking medications or with medical conditions that can interact with alcohol. For those with a family history of alcoholism, be mindful of alcohol consumption and associated addictive behaviors.

The new Dietary Guidelines for Americans remove the previous recommendation to limit alcohol intake to 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women, when alcohol is consumed.

Q&A

Thank you!

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A big thank you to the members of the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup and its members. Without you, this report would not have been possible.