



Communicating the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines

Core elements for communicating to the public

Introduction

1. For many people in the UK, alcohol is part of their social lives. As with most activities, drinking alcohol carries a degree of risk. In 2016, new guidelines were developed by the UK CMOs to enable people to make informed choices about their alcohol intake. The guidelines are not intended to prevent those who want to drink alcohol from doing so.
2. The Government believes people have a right to accurate information and clear advice about alcohol and its health risks and that it has a responsibility to ensure this information is provided for the public in an open and clear way, so they can make informed choices.
3. The Department of Health wishes to work with the alcohol industry and other partners to build on the actions to date on consumer information; enabling people to make decisions about when and how much they drink and helping to reduce alcohol-related health harms.
4. With this in mind, this document sets out the core elements of the guidelines that we would wish to see communicated to the public.
5. In line with the Portman Group's advice we hope that companies will continue to ensure that the information on labels:
 - Is clear, legible, displayed on the primary packaging and not be difficult for consumers to find.
 - Is grouped together and companies are encouraged to differentiate the information from other information on the packaging, for example by use of a box, spacing and background colour).
 - Is not on a part of the primary packaging that is dispensed with before or immediately when the product is opened.
 - Does not contain anything which serves to undermine the health messaging.

Weekly drinking guideline

This applies to adults who drink regularly or frequently i.e. most weeks

The Chief Medical Officers' guideline for both men and women is that:

- To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis.
- If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days. If you have one or two heavy drinking episodes a week, you increase your risks of death from long-term illness and from accidents and injuries.
- The risk of developing a range of health problems (including cancers of the mouth, throat and breast) increases the more you drink on a regular basis.
- If you wish to cut down the amount you drink, a good way to help achieve this is to have several drink-free days each week.

6. The Department of Health suggests this guideline could be communicated in the following manner:

**The UK Chief Medical Officers
recommend adults do not regularly
drink more than 14 units per week**

Single occasion drinking episodes

This applies to drinking on any single occasion (not regular drinking, which is covered by the weekly guideline)

The Chief Medical Officers' advice for men and women who wish to keep their short-term health risks from single occasion drinking episodes to a low level is to reduce them by:

- limiting the total amount of alcohol you drink on any single occasion
- drinking more slowly, drinking with food, and alternating with water
- planning ahead to avoid problems e.g. by making sure you can get home safely or that you have people you trust with you.

The sorts of things that are more likely to happen if you do not understand and judge correctly the risks of drinking too much on a single occasion can include:

- accidents resulting in injury, causing death in some cases
- misjudging risky situations, and
- losing self-control (e.g. engaging in unprotected sex).

Some groups of people are more likely to be affected by alcohol and should be more careful of their level of drinking on any one occasion for example those at risk of falls, those on medication that may interact with alcohol or where it may exacerbate pre-existing physical and mental health problems.

If you are a regular weekly drinker and you wish to keep both your short- and long-term health risks from drinking low, this single episode drinking advice is also relevant for you.

7. The Department of Health suggests this advice could be communicated in the following manner:

Drinkaware.co.uk

Pregnancy and drinking

The Chief Medical Officers' guideline is that:

- If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.
- Drinking in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to the baby, with the more you drink the greater the risk.

The risk of harm to the baby is likely to be low if you have drunk only small amounts of alcohol before you knew you were pregnant or during pregnancy.

If you find out you are pregnant after you have drunk alcohol during early pregnancy, you should avoid further drinking. You should be aware that it is unlikely in most cases that your baby has been affected. If you are worried about alcohol use during pregnancy do talk to your doctor or midwife.

8. The Department of Health suggests this guideline could be communicated in the following manner:



OR

It is safest not to drink alcohol when pregnant