

Fact sheet // Alcohol and NCDs

Non-communicable diseases account for 70 per cent of all deaths globally and is a rapidly growing problem in low- and middle income countries. Alcohol is one of the main risk factors.

The four main types of non-communicable diseases are cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease. Behind these are four main risk factors: smoking, alcohol, unhealthy eating habits and insufficient physical activity.

Researchers find that an increasing part of the disease burden in the world is due to non-communicable diseases. Africa is the continent where the problems with non-communicable diseases are increasing most rapidly.¹

In total, non-communicable diseases account for more than half of the world's total ill health and account for nearly 55 million premature deaths annually.² About 31 million of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.³

The poor suffer the most from non-communicable diseases. Family finances often deteriorate drastically when someone becomes ill. At national level, these diseases have become so widespread that productivity is affected and both economic and social development is seriously threatened.

Alcohol major risk factor

Alcohol has been identified as one of four major risk factors behind non-communicable diseases by the WHO.³ To prevent future harm alcohol consumption needs to decrease.

In brief:

// Non-communicable diseases are a rapidly growing health problem in the world, and **affect the low- and middle income countries the worst**. If nothing is done, both economic and social development will be threatened.

// One of the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases is alcohol. There are **clear connections between alcohol and cancer, liver disease and mental health**.

// According to the WHO, the most effective measures are **high prices, limited availability and heavy restrictions or ban on alcohol marketing**.

The WHO has identified three policy interventions that research has proven to be most cost-effective: Increased alcohol prices through taxes, prohibitions or heavy restrictions on alcohol marketing, and reduced physical availability of alcohol, for example by limiting retailers' opening hours.⁴

In recent years, taxes have increasingly been mentioned in discussions on prevention of non-communicable diseases. Higher prices can be used not only to reduce consumption of alcohol but also of products such as unhealthy foods. In addition, it is increasingly pointed out that taxes can provide resources for health promotion efforts.

Clear link to cancer

Studies show a clear link between alcohol and cancer. There is no safe level; the more the individual consumes the more the risk

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increases. The link is strongest when it comes to cancer of the oesophagus, mouth, throat, liver, colon and rectum, and, for females, breasts.⁵

The connection between alcohol and cancer is not very well known. An EU survey shows that only 36 per cent of EU citizens know that alcohol can cause cancer.⁷

Recently, a number of British scientists drew attention to the fact that the alcohol industry has for a long time been doing its best to mislead the public by toning down and distorting the relationship between alcohol and cancer, in a manner that resembles the strategies of the tobacco industry.⁸

There is also clear connection between alcohol and a large number of other diseases. In the case of non-communicable diseases, liver disease, especially liver cirrhosis, should be mentioned. Among men who drink on average 30 grams of alcohol per day, the risk of dying of liver cirrhosis almost three times higher than the average.⁶

In Agenda 2030, goal 3.4 aims to reduce premature death due to non-communicable diseases by one third. To make this a reality, the major risk factors – including alcohol – must be effectively prevented.

Referenser

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2. Benziger, C. P., Roth, G. A., & Moran, A. E. (2016). The Global Burden of Disease Study and the Preventable Burden of NCD. *Global Heart*, 11(4), 393–397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ghart.2016.10.024>
3. Noncommunicable diseases, WHO Fact sheet, updated

Recommendations

// Preventive measures against non-communicable diseases should contain efforts to **reduce alcohol consumption**. We recommend a combination of mobilization, education and policy measures at local and national level.

// In terms of policy measures, we advocate compliance with the **recommendations of the WHO**. Alcohol taxes, limited availability (for example limited opening hours) and heavy restrictions on alcohol marketing are most effective.

// Many low-income and middle-income countries currently have no effective alcohol policy. **A global framework convention on alcohol**, similar to that of the tobacco sector, would radically improve the situation.

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About us

The international work of the IOGT-NTO Movement takes place in 14 countries in East Africa, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and the Balkans. Our focus is on alcohol as an obstacle to development.

Read more at www.iogntororelsen.se/internationellt/ or contact us at info@iogntororelsen.se.

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