Evidence-Based Strategies to Prevent Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms

Background

Excessive alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States, and results in an average of more than 79,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. Excessive alcohol consumption also increases the risk of many other health and social problems, including motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence, high blood pressure, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy.

Strategies

The Community Preventive Services Task Force **recommends** several strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms. These strategies are based on systematic reviews of the scientific evidence on intervention effectiveness.

Dram Shop Liability laws set out circumstances in which alcohol retail establishments may be held accountable for injuries or harms caused by underage or intoxicated customers who were served alcohol. Some states impose restrictions on dram shop liability by capping the amount of compensation allowed in suits, by increasing the evidence required to demonstrate responsibility, or by imposing statutes of limitation.

Increasing Alcohol Taxes has been shown to reduce alcohol-related harms in addition to raising revenue. Alcohol taxes are implemented at the state and federal level, and are beverage-specific (i.e., they differ for beer, wine and spirits). These taxes are usually based on the amount of beverage purchased (not on the sales price), so their effects can erode over time due to inflation if they are not adjusted regularly.

Maintaining Limits on Days of Sale aims, in part, to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Most policies target weekend days (usually Sundays), and they may apply either to alcohol outlets in which alcohol may be legally sold for the buyer to drink at the place of purchase (on-premises outlets, such as bars or restaurants) or to outlets in which alcohol may be sold for the buyer to drink elsewhere (off-premises outlets, such as liquor stores). In the United States, policies may be made at the state level and, where not prohibited by state pre-emption laws, at local levels.

Maintaining Limits on Hours of Sale also is intended, in part, to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Policies may apply to on- or off-premises alcohol outlets. They may be made at the state level and, where not prohibited by state pre-emption laws, at local levels.

Regulation of Alcohol Outlet Density is defined as applying state, county, city, or other type of governmental control to reduce or limit the number of places that can legally sell alcohol within a given area. Regulation is often implemented through licensing or zoning processes. An alcohol outlet is a place where alcohol may be legally sold for the buyer to drink there or elsewhere.

Maintaining Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) Laws involves supporting legislation that specifies an age below which the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages are not permitted. MLDA laws have been shown to reduce alcohol-related crashes and associated injuries among 18- to 20-year-old drivers. All states currently have an MLDA of 21 years.

Enhanced Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Sales to Minors initiates or increases the frequency of retailer compliance checks for laws against the sale of alcohol to minors. These "sting operations" are conducted by, or coordinated with local law enforcement or alcohol beverage control (ABC) agencies, and violators receive legal or administrative sanctions. Programs are often conducted as part of multicomponent, community-based efforts, and many include strategies to increase perceived risk of detection by publicizing the increased enforcement activities and cautioning proprietors against selling alcohol to minors.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force **recommends against:**

Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales—the repeal of state, county, city, or other type of governmental control over the retail sales alcohol, which allows commercial retailing. States with government control of alcohol sales are referred to as *control* states, and states with privatized sale are referred to as *license* states. The privatization of retail alcohol sales generally applies only to off-premises alcohol outlets and does not generally affect the retail sales of alcoholic beverages at on-premises alcohol outlets.

The Task Force and Community Guide

The Guide for Community Preventive Services (Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based findings and recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) is an independent, nonfederal, unpaid group whose members are appointed by the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Task Force bases its findings and recommendation on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. These reviews are conducted, with oversight from the Task Force, by scientists and subject matter experts from CDC in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners. The reviews and the Task Force findings and recommendations are compiled in *The Community Guide*.

Visit www.thecommunityguide.org for more information about these and other strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms, including interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving.

Media Advisory

For Immediate Release: November 10, 2010
Contact: CDC Division of Media Relations (/media/)
(404) 639-3286

CDC's Guide to Community Preventive Services has released two reports on "Maintaining Limits on Days and Hours of Sale of Alcoholic Beverages to Prevent Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms". These reports were posted online today by the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine (http://www.ajpm-online.net/content/advance)* and will be published in their December 2010 issue.

The reports show that increasing the number of hours and days when alcohol can be sold in bars, restaurants, and liquor stores leads to greater alcohol use and related harms, especially motor-vehicle crashes. National, state, and local policies that remove previously banned alcohol sales on weekend days (usually Sundays) or that increase the hours of sale by 2 or more hours contribute to excessive drinking and many dangerous outcomes, including driving after drinking and alcohol-related assault and injury.

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent, nonfederal body of public health experts, recommends maintaining limits on the days or hours during which alcohol can legally be sold, based upon a state-of-the-art systematic review process of all available studies on the topic.

Laws and policies regulating the availability of alcohol, including limits on the number of days of the week or hours when alcoholic beverages can be sold, are effective public health strategies to prevent the harms that result from drinking too much.

Excessive alcohol use causes more than 79,000 deaths in the U.S. each year and contributes to a wide range of health and social problems. For more information, see www.thecommunityguide.org (http://www.thecommunityguide.org/)

Background on The Community Guide

The Community Guide is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations and findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, volunteer body of public health and prevention experts —makes these findings and recommendations based on systematic reviews of scientific literature conducted under the auspices of the Community Guide. CDC provides ongoing scientific, administrative and technical support for the Task Force.

###

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (http://www.hhs.gov/)

- Historical Document: November 10, 2010
- Content source: Office of the Associate Director for Communication, Division of News and Electronic Media (mailto:media@cdc.gov&subject=Newsroom%20Website)
- Notice: Links to non-governmental sites do not necessarily represent the views of the CDC.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Rd. Atlanta, GA 30333, USA
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) TTY: (888) 232-6348 - cdcinfo@cdc.gov