

# ALCOHOL WARNING LABELS

## What is a health warning label?

A health warning label is a message located on the container, bottle, can, or package that advises users about the **potential risks and harms of a product**.

There are only 47 countries worldwide that mandate health and safety warning labels on alcohol bottles or containers (1). In most cases, these alcohol warning labels are small, with messages that are unspecific, without following scientific criteria.

Alcoholic beverages are the only harmful products widely consumed for which there are no requirements or standards related to the content, quality, nutritional value, and other information commonly seen on other products.

## Why have an alcohol warning label?

- Consumers have a right to know about the health and safety risks associated with consuming alcohol.
- Warning labels are an efficient way to communicate evidence-based information to users, particularly frequent consumers.
- Warning labels can help influence the decisions of young people and are important to protect children and other vulnerable populations.
- Warning labels can start or stimulate discussion and deliberations about alcohol and health.
- Warning labels can complement and support other alcohol policies such as alcohol pricing/taxation and regulation of alcohol marketing.

## Do alcohol health warning labels work?

Yes, in recent years there is growing evidence of what label characteristics are associated with a successful impact (2), including increased awareness and knowledge that alcohol can cause cancer (3).



## What are the health harms associated with alcohol use?

There were an estimated **3.0 million alcohol-attributable deaths in 2016**, corresponding to 5.3% of all deaths (4).

Globally, an estimated **4.1% of all new cases of cancer in 2020** were attributable to alcohol consumption(5). Harms associated with alcohol use include:

- Injuries
- Interpersonal violence;
- Alcohol poisoning;
- Risky sexual behaviors;

- Miscarriage and stillbirth or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD);
- High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems;
- Learning and memory problems;
- Mental health problems;
- Social problems, including family

problems, job-related problems, and unemployment;

- Alcohol use disorders or alcohol dependence;
- Several types of cancer, including breast cancer, oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus; and cancers of the colon, rectum, and liver.



## Recommendations

**Every country should implement mandated alcohol health warning labels** that are based on the best evidence on design and content and evaluate the impacts of the labels on perceptions and behavior of consumers.



Warning labels often focus on messages or symbols about underage drinking, pregnancy, or drink-driving; however, there are many other alcohol-related harms to health that consumers should be aware of, such as violence and cancer.

Alcohol warning labels should:

- Focus on alcohol-related harms to health that consumers should be aware of, such as violence and cancer.
- Have factual, clearly stated information;
- Be large with colorful messages accompanied by graphics;
- Have rotating health messages.

## References:

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