



Risky Drinking Can Put a Chill on Your Summer Fun

Summer is typically a wonderful season for outdoor activities and spending additional time with family and friends. For some people, these activities include drinking alcoholic beverages. In light of the coronavirus pandemic as well as the negative consequences associated with drinking, it is particularly important this summer to take measures to protect your own health and that of your loved ones. This includes following the everyday practices recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to [reduce the risk of contracting and spreading the coronavirus](#).

Protect Your Health During the Pandemic

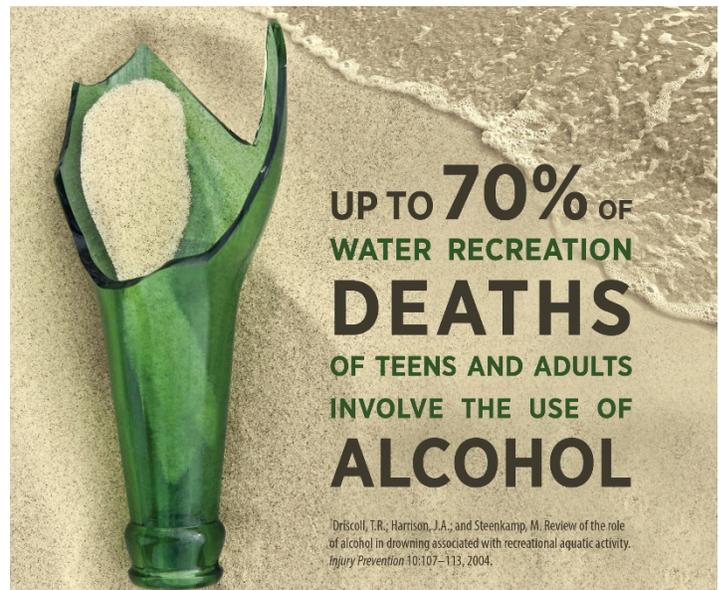
Drinking impairs both physical and mental abilities, and it also decreases inhibitions. Reduced inhibitions from drinking may affect a person's ability to take the precautions needed to reduce their risk of contracting the coronavirus or spreading it to others, such as maintaining appropriate physical distance and wearing a mask. In addition to being mindful of how much alcohol you're consuming, know the steps needed to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 while engaging in [outdoor recreation](#) and [other summer activities](#). For those who choose to drink during the pandemic, below are additional issues to watch out for when participating in summer activities.

Swimmers Can Get in Over Their Heads

Alcohol impairs judgment and increases risk-taking, a dangerous combination for swimmers. Even experienced swimmers may venture out farther than they should and not be able to make it back to shore, or they may not notice how chilled they're getting and develop hypothermia. Surfers could become overconfident and try to ride a wave beyond their abilities. Even around a pool, alcohol can have tragic consequences. Inebriated divers may collide with the diving board, or dive where the water is too shallow.

Boaters Can Lose Their Bearings

The U.S. Coast Guard reports that alcohol consumption contributes to 19 percent of boating deaths in which the primary cause is known, making alcohol the leading known contributor of fatal boating accidents.¹ A boat operator with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent or higher is 14 times more likely to be killed in a boating accident than an operator with no alcohol in their system. Reaching a 0.08 percent BAC would require about 4 drinks in 2 hours for an average-size woman (171 lbs) or 5 drinks in 2 hours for an average-size man (198 lbs). It is important to note that the odds of a fatal crash begin to increase with the first drink.² In addition, according to the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, alcohol can impair a boater's judgment, balance, vision, and reaction time. It can also increase fatigue and susceptibility to the effects of cold-water immersion. If problems arise, intoxicated boaters are ill-equipped to respond quickly and find solutions. For passengers, intoxication can lead to slips on deck, falls overboard, or accidents at the dock.



Drivers Can Go Off Course

The summer holidays are some of the most dangerous times of the year to be on the road. When on vacation, drivers may be traveling an unfamiliar route or hauling a boat or camper, with the distraction of pets and children in the car. Adding alcohol to the mix puts the lives of the driver and everyone in the car, as well as other people on the road, at risk.

Dehydration Is a Risk

Whether you're on the road or in the great outdoors, heat plus alcohol can equal trouble. Hot summer days cause fluid loss through perspiration, while alcohol causes fluid loss through increased urination. Together, they can quickly lead to dehydration or heat stroke.

Protect Your Skin

Sunburns can put a damper on summer vacations. People who drink alcohol while celebrating in the sun are less likely to wear sunscreen. And laboratory research suggests that alcohol lowers the amount of sun exposure needed to produce burns. This is all bad news, as repeated sunburns increase the risk of skin cancer. Whether drinking or not, be sure to slather on the sunscreen to maximize your summer fun!

Stay Safe and Stay Healthy

Be smart this summer—think before you drink. [Practice measures to avoid the spread of the coronavirus to yourself and others](#). Avoiding alcoholic beverages while piloting a boat, driving a car, exploring the wilderness, and swimming or surfing can also help keep you and your loved ones safe. If you are a parent, understand the underage drinking laws—and set a good example.



So what's in that drink, exactly?

Summer cocktails may be stronger, more caloric, and more expensive than you realize. You may be watching what you eat so you can fit into those summer clothes, but watching what you drink can keep you safe. NIAAA's alcohol calculators can help you assess calories, drink size, alcohol spending, blood alcohol levels, and the number of standard drinks in each cocktail.

Visit <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/calculators/Default.aspx>

For more information on preventing problems with alcohol this summer, and tips on cutting back, visit: <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov>

¹ U.S. Coast Guard. 2018 Recreational boating statistics. <https://www.uscgboating.org/library/accident-statistics/Recreational-Boating-Statistics-2018.pdf>. Accessed May 20, 2020.

² Smith, G.; Keyl, P.; Hadley, J.; et al. Drinking and recreational boating fatalities: A population-based case-control study. *JAMA* 286:2974–2980, 2001.



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