

Alcohol Consumption Rises Sharply During Pandemic Shutdown; Heavy Drinking by Women Rises 41%

FOR RELEASE

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American adults have sharply increased their consumption of alcohol during the shutdown triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, with women increasing their heavy drinking episodes (four or more drinks within a couple of hours) by 41%, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

A national survey found that the overall frequency of alcohol consumption increased by 14% among adults over age 30, compared to the same time last year. The increase was 19% among all adults aged 30 to 59, 17% among women, and 10% among for non-Hispanic white adults.

The results are published as a research letter in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

“We’ve had anecdotal information about people buying and consuming more alcohol, but this is some of the first survey-based information that shows how much alcohol consumption has increased during the pandemic,” said Michael Pollard, lead author of the study and a sociologist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization.

“Alcohol consumption can have significant negative health consequences, so this information suggests another way that the pandemic may be affecting the physical and mental health of Americans,” Pollard said.

Researchers say that the alcohol spike seen among women, younger adults, and non-Hispanic white individuals highlights the need for primary care providers, behavioral health providers, and family members to be aware of the risks of increased alcohol use and heavy drinking during the pandemic.

The findings also suggests that future research should examine whether increases in alcohol use persist as the pandemic continues, and whether psychological and physical well-being are subsequently affected.

The study is based on a survey of 1,540 adults who are members of the RAND American Life Panel, a nationally representative internet panel. Participants were surveyed about their alcohol consumption during the Spring of 2019 and again in Spring 2020 during the early months of the pandemic shutdown.

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Researcher Spotlight

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Michael S. Pollard is a senior sociologist at the RAND Corporation and a professor at the Pardee RAND

Graduate School. His primary research areas include demography, family, and social networks and health (physical, mental, and health behaviors). His recent work has focused on the health...

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Support for the study was provided by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as a part of ongoing study about alcohol consumption in the U.S.

Other authors of the study are [Joan S. Tucker](#) of RAND and Harold D. Green Jr. of the Indiana University School of Public Health.

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