

# Alcohol Use and COVID-19

## Background:

Excessive alcohol use leads to approximately 88,000 deaths and 2.5 million years of potential life lost each year in the U.S. and cost \$249 billion in 2010 (\$8.2 billion in Michigan).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, excessive drinking is responsible for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults aged 20-64, and is the third leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.<sup>1, 2</sup> Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and recent surge in alcohol sales, it is critical to remind Michiganders of the harmful effects that alcohol use can cause, and how alcohol use may impact vulnerability to, and complications from, COVID-19.

Alcohol use can increase the risk of numerous short and long term health conditions including but not limited to: injuries, motor vehicle crashes, domestic violence, liver disease, heart disease, and cancer.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, alcohol has effects on almost every organ in the body and can even weaken the immune system, especially during heavy use, increasing your chances of getting sick.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, heavy alcohol use increases the risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome, one of the most severe complications of COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

## Alcohol and COVID-19 Myths:<sup>3</sup>

1. **Myth:** Consuming alcohol destroys the virus that causes COVID-19.
  - a. **Fact:** Consuming alcohol will not destroy the virus, and its consumption is more likely to increase the health risks if a person becomes infected with COVID-19.
2. **Myth:** Drinking strong alcohol kills the virus that you may inhale from the air.
  - a. **Fact:** Consumption of alcohol will not kill the virus a person may inhale from the air. Additionally, the consumption of strong alcohol will not disinfect your mouth and throat and will not give you any kind of protection from COVID-19.
3. **Myth:** Alcohol stimulates immunity and resistance to COVID-19.
  - a. **Fact:** Alcohol has a detrimental effect on your immune system and will not stimulate immunity and/or virus protection.

## Conclusion:

The consumption of alcohol will not protect a person from becoming infected with COVID-19. In fact, alcohol is more likely to increase a person's vulnerability by weakening the immune system and increasing the risk of adverse health outcomes. For a more in-depth look at alcohol and COVID-19, please review the recent document released by the World Health Organization (WHO) titled "Alcohol and COVID-19: What you need to know."

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019. Alcohol and Public Health. Alcohol use and your health. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol Facts and Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>.

<sup>3</sup> The World Health Organization. 2020. Alcohol and COVID-19: what you need to know. Retrieved from: [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/437608/Alcohol-and-COVID-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/437608/Alcohol-and-COVID-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf).

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