



Alcohol Policy Fact Sheet

Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption by Regulating Availability

Regulating the availability of alcohol is a strategy that works to reduce excessive alcohol use and related health and social problems, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Task Force on Community Preventive Services¹.

What does the Task Force recommend²?

To reduce excessive alcohol consumption and related harms, the CDC Task Force on Community Preventive Services recommends:

- **maintaining current government control over alcohol sales,**
- **maintaining limits on days and hours of alcohol sales,**
- **limiting alcohol outlet density.**

Task Force Findings

Intervention	Finding
Interventions Directed Toward the General Population	
Regulation of alcohol outlet density	Recommended based on sufficient evidence
Maintaining limits on days of sale	Recommended based on strong evidence
Maintaining limits on hours of sale	Recommended based on sufficient evidence
Increasing alcohol taxes	Recommended based on strong evidence
Overservice law enforcement initiatives	Insufficient Evidence
Dram shop liability	Recommended based on strong evidence
Interventions Directed Toward Underage Drinkers	
Enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors	Recommended based on sufficient evidence

www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/CGWebAlcoholSlides113010.pdf

Why?

Excessive alcohol use in the United States takes an enormous toll on individuals, families, and communities. One way to help people drink less and to prevent the dangers that arise from drinking too much is to limit access to purchasing alcohol.

Privatization of alcohol sales commonly results in increases in the days

¹ The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent, nonfederal, volunteer body of public health and prevention experts, was established by the Director of the CDC to issue recommendations and findings to help inform decision making about health-related policy. Unless otherwise noted, all information contained in this fact sheet comes from the Task Force’s report.

² Task Force recommendations may be viewed online at: <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/index.html>, last updated May 16, 2011, and <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/privatization.html>, last updated May 11, 2011.

and hours of sale. When states or communities increase the number of hours and days when alcohol can be sold in bars, restaurants, and stores, the result is increased access to purchasing alcohol, increased per capita alcohol consumption and more harms from drinking, especially motor vehicle crashes. The CDC's Task Force found that people are more likely to experience harms from drinking too much when communities increase the hours that alcohol can be sold by two or more hours or when policies remove previously banned alcohol sales on weekends.

Privatization of alcohol sales also commonly results in increases in the number of places that sell alcohol. The Task Force found a positive association between alcohol outlet density and excessive alcohol use and with increases in social harms, including interpersonal violence and vandalism. Regulating the number of places in a given area where alcohol may be legally sold (outlet density) is an effective way to prevent excessive alcohol use.

In addition, privatization of alcohol sales may be associated with:

- increased alcohol advertising³,
- lax enforcement of sales regulations, including enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age.

What is excessive alcohol use?

Excessive alcohol consumption can take the form of heavy drinking, binge drinking, or both. Underage drinking is also considered a form of excess alcohol consumption since it often involves consumption in quantities and settings that can lead to serious immediate and long-term consequences. People aged 12 to 20 years drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States. More than 90% of this alcohol is consumed in the form of binge drinking⁴.

Excessive alcohol consumption is a risk factor for:

- unintentional injuries such as motor vehicle injuries, falls, burns, and firearm injuries.
- violence, including child maltreatment and intimate partner violence.
- health problems such as liver disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and psychological disorders.

Alcohol policy plays an important role in state and community-wide strategies for curbing excessive alcohol use. The Task Force recommendations are based solely on evidence related to the public health consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. The maintenance of government control of the sale of alcoholic beverages is one of many effective strategies to prevent or reduce excessive alcohol consumption.

³ Research clearly indicates that, in addition to parents and peers, alcohol advertising and marketing have a significant impact on youth decisions to drink. *Alcohol Advertising and Youth Fact Sheet*, Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth, www.CAMY.org

⁴ *Drinking in America: Myths, Realities and Prevention Policy*, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2005, www.PIRE.org