

Research summary

Handle with care: The need for responsible alcohol delivery

May 2024

This briefing summarises the key findings of a survey commissioned by Alcohol Change UK about alcohol delivery.

The survey is, to our knowledge, the first nationally representative study in the UK to investigate the experiences of people who use alcohol delivery services.

Key Findings:

- Most people order deliveries because it's more convenient than visiting physical shops.
- Almost half of people (47%) had their most recent order delivered on the same day.
- Alcohol deliveries make it easier for us to carry on drinking, when we might otherwise have stopped.
- Three in ten people have ordered a delivery when drunk.
- Regular users of alcohol delivery services (those ordering at least once a month) tend to drink more than average for the UK.
- Less than a quarter of 18-25s (22%) always have their ID checked on the doorstep.
- Marketing plays a role, with 64% of survey respondents and 82% of 18-25 year olds prompted to order by a promotion at least once in the last three months.

Recommendations:

- Improve age-checking for home deliveries.
- Restrict alcohol marketing via delivery platforms.
- Update licensing laws to be fit for a digital age.
- Ensure delivery drivers have training, time and support to recognise and potentially refuse delivery to people who are under 18 or intoxicated.

Why did we do the research?

The ways we shop for alcohol have changed, with more of us choosing to have alcohol delivered to our homes, our workplaces and elsewhere, instead of, and/or as well as, acquiring alcohol via the traditional means of physical shops, bars and pubs.

This trend increased noticeably during the COVID-19 pandemic and has shown few signs of slowing down since then. Alcohol can now be ordered, online or via telephone, for delivery in as little as 15 minutes and at competitive prices. This offers a new kind of alcohol availability few could have predicted a decade ago.

There had been some research into alcohol delivery in the USⁱ and Australiaⁱⁱ, but no-one had yet investigated the issue in the UK.

How was the research carried out?

We commissioned market research agency C.Liddle Consulting to carry out an online survey. We worked with the agency to design the survey, developing questions informed by measures in previous surveys on drinking behaviour and motivationsⁱⁱⁱ and alcohol delivery^{iv}.

The survey was carried out online between 18 January to 6 February 2024, with the sample of 2,001 UK adults sourced from market research panel, Cint. Respondents were included if they were over 18, living in the UK and had ordered alcohol for delivery at least monthly in the last three months. Quotas were set to ensure sample was nationally representative for the UK in age, gender and region. The final sample was also diverse in terms of socioeconomic group and ethnicity.

The majority of the questions were quantitative, with three open-ended questions to enable participants to add information. The survey length was approximately 10 minutes, and at the end of the survey participants were signposted to independent support services related to alcohol use and mental health.

The statistical analysis was carried out by C.Liddle Consulting, with further analysis and interpretation of the findings carried out by Mark Leyshon and Laura Harvey at Alcohol Change UK.

Key findings

Why is alcohol delivery popular?

The most common reason given by respondents was convenience, with 50% of all respondents and 66% of those over 65 giving this reason. Respondents also thought using such retailers saved them money. Home deliveries can be helpful for people, especially those who find it difficult to get to the shops because of caring responsibilities, disabilities or juggling work and life.

Why does availability matter?

There is strong evidence that increased availability of alcohol is linked to higher consumption and harm.^v Our research shows that people ordering alcohol for delivery at least once a month tend to drink often, with 61% drinking more than once a week. Almost half (45%) were drinking more than the recommended maximum of 14 units a week (equivalent to six pints of normal strength beer or lager or a bottle and a half of wine, per week). This is much higher than average for the UK, with most recent surveys reporting between 20-30% of the UK population drinking at these higher risk levels.^{vi}

Alcohol delivery can enable those of us who drink to buy large quantities, for more hours in the day, and have these delivered very quickly. Just under half of our survey respondents (47%) had their most recent order delivered on the same day, with 11% receiving it in less than 30 minutes.

Deliveries and drinking

Rapid availability allows us to extend drinking sessions when we might otherwise have stopped, with 30% of respondents reporting that they had ever ordered alcohol while drunk, and 35% telling us that they had ever ordered for delivery because they had run out of alcohol and wanted to continue drinking. Over half of those who ordered because they had run out (53%) said they would have stopped if the delivery service hadn't been available.

Although it is currently illegal in England and Wales to knowingly sell alcohol to someone who appears drunk, it is likely impossible to check this at the point of sale for remote orders, and the law around delivering to someone who appears drunk is less clear.

With harm caused by alcohol on the rise, the convenience of deliveries can be a double-edged sword. Some of our participants felt that this easy access has meant drinking more.

While the majority of survey participants (53%) felt that alcohol delivery hadn't had an impact on their drinking, 1 in 10 said they now drink alcohol on more days in the week, and 9% said they drink more on a typical day. Our research also found that people who reported drinking as a way to cope with tension, depression and bad moods tended to order alcohol for delivery more often.

One participant in her 20s told us:

"It is very convenient, effortless, and more anonymous. However, it increased the amount I drink, since I don't have to carry it myself or get ready to go to a shop. [It] saves time and there is little price difference."

Our recommendation:

Alcohol availability has changed massively since licensing rules in England and Wales were last updated, over 20 years ago. Home delivery has expanded the number of outlets selling alcohol. We can buy alcohol 24/7 and have it delivered within 30 minutes. **Our Licensing Laws need to be reformed to be fit for the digital age.**

Can harm reduction happen on the doorstep?

[Previous research commissioned by Alcohol Change UK](#) highlighted that delivery drivers need more time, training and support to help reduce potential harm from alcohol deliveries.^{vii} Drivers have told us about the challenges of assessing whether someone is drunk during a quick interaction on the doorstep, in sometimes isolated situations and without clear guidance about their roles or responsibilities.

An alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest option for children and young people.^{viii} However, delivery companies are not effectively checking that people receiving deliveries are over 18. [Previous work by Alcohol Change UK](#) highlighted that age verification online is not effective, both in terms of the systems used online, and the failure of many delivery drivers to ask for ID.^{ix} Most retailers have signed up to 'Challenge 25', which involves always checking ID for all customers who appear under 25. However, in our recent survey only 22% of 18-25s said that their ID was always checked when they have alcohol delivered. The lowest reported ID checking for this age group was for deliveries from subscription services (15%) and supermarkets (16%).

When we buy alcohol in a shop or bar, staff are trained to recognise and refuse delivery to customers who are under 18 or intoxicated. Delivery drivers face unique challenges, working alone and sometimes in isolated areas. Clear laws, proper training and secure working conditions could all support drivers to be better able to ensure that alcohol is being delivered responsibly.

Our recommendations:

- **Delivery drivers need enough time, training and support to potentially refuse delivery to customers who are under 18 or intoxicated.**
- **Age checking on delivery should be mandatory, with delivery drivers given training and enough time and support to carry these out.**

What about advertising?

Online and mobile platforms have also transformed the way that advertising works. We can receive tailored notifications, promotions and marketing, and when we click on these we're taken straight through to making an order. Online adverts can end up being seen by children and people who are trying not to drink alcohol. In our survey, 64% of respondents reported that they had been prompted to order alcohol for delivery by a promotion at least once in the last three months. This was even higher for 18-25 year olds (82%). At the moment, the industry self-regulates marketing and advertising of alcohol. We need more effective restrictions on marketing via delivery platforms, and the option to opt-out of adverts and app notifications.

Our recommendations:

- **We should have more control over alcohol marketing, and be able to opt out if we don't want to be prompted to buy drinks.**
- **The UK government needs to carry out a formal review of advertising rules and bring in effective, legally binding restrictions that protect public health.**

No ordinary commodity

We are now used to having many different things delivered straight to our door. However alcohol is no ordinary commodity^x, so how it is promoted and delivered needs thought and care. Harm caused by alcohol is at an all-time high^{xi}, and this is a growing issue.^{xii} Both governments and retailers have a responsibility to reduce harms related to alcohol delivery.

Background on Alcohol Change UK

Alcohol Change UK is the leading UK charity working to reduce alcohol harm. Our vision is of a society that is free from serious alcohol harm, delivered through five key changes: improved knowledge, better policies and regulation, shifted cultural norms, improved drinking behaviours, and increasingly better support and treatment options. **We're not anti-alcohol, we're anti-alcohol harm.** We focus on evidence and compassion. We fund research, deliver the incredible Dry January® campaign, provide training to public-facing professionals through our award-winning Blue Light project and much more.

For more information please contact Mark Leyshon, Senior Policy and Research Manager mark.leyshon@alcoholchange.org.uk or Laura Harvey, Policy and Research Manager laura.harvey@alcoholchange.org.uk

Notes:

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- ⁱ Noel, J.K. and Rosenthal, S.R. (2023) [Impact of alcohol home delivery and other methods of obtaining alcohol in young adults](#) *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 58(6): 606-611; Grossman, E.R., Benjamin-Neelon, S.E. and Sonnenschein, S. (2022) [Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Home Delivery Laws during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) *Substance Use & Addiction* 43(1)
- ⁱⁱ Colbert, S., Wilkinson, C., Thornton, L., Feng, X., Campaign, A. and Richmond, R. (2023) [Cross-sectional survey of a convenience sample of Australians who use alcohol home delivery services](#). *Drug and Alcohol Review* 42: p. 986-995; Coomber, K., Baldwin, R., Taylor, N., Callinan, S., Wilkinson, C., Toubourou, J.W., Chikritzhs, T. and Miller, P.G. (2023) [Characteristics of high- and low-risk drinkers who use online alcohol home delivery in Western Australia](#) *Drug and Alcohol Review* 43(2): 407-415
- ⁱⁱⁱ D'Aquino, S., Callinan, S., Smit, K., Mojica-Perez, Y., Kuntsche, E. (2023) [Why do adults drink alcohol? Development and validation of a Drinking Motives Questionnaire for adults](#). *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 37(3), 402–415; Drinkaware (2023) [Drinkaware Monitor 2023 Technical Report](#); Moskalewicz J., Sieroslawski J. (2010) [Drinking Population Surveys—Guidance Document for Standardized Approach](#). Warsaw: Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology.; Manjula D. N., Langley, T., Szatkowski, L. and Lewis, S. (2016) [Measuring Alcohol Consumption in Population Surveys: A Review of International Guidelines and Comparison with Surveys in England](#), *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 51(1): p84–92,
- ^{iv} Colbert, S., Wilkinson, C., Thornton, L., Feng, X., Campaign, A. and Richmond, R. (2023) [Cross-sectional survey of a convenience sample of Australians who use alcohol home delivery services](#). *Drug and Alcohol Review* 42: p. 986-995; Mojica-Perez, Y., Callinan, S., Livingston, M. (2019) [Alcohol home delivery services: an investigation of use and risk](#).
- ^v Babor, T., Casswell, S., Graham, K., Huckle, T., Livingston, M., Rehm, J., Room, R., Rossow, I. and Sornpaisarn, B. (2022) [Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity – a summary of the third edition](#). *Addiction* 117(12): 3024-3036
- ^{vi} Alcohol Toolkit Study (2024) [Monthly Tracking KPI](#) [Accessed 15th April 2024]
- ^{vii} Alcohol Change UK (2022) [Delivering a problem? Online sales and deliveries of alcohol – how robust are current systems in protecting children and vulnerable adults from alcohol harm?](#)
- ^{viii} Donaldson, L. (2009) [Guidance on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people](#), DHSC
- ^{ix} Alcohol Change UK (2022) [Delivering a problem? Online sales and deliveries of alcohol – how robust are current systems in protecting children and vulnerable adults from alcohol harm?](#)
- ^x Babor, T., Casswell, S., Graham, K., Huckle, T., Livingston, M., Rehm, J., Room, R., Rossow, I. and Sornpaisarn, B. (2022) [Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity – a summary of the third edition](#). *Addiction* 117(12): 3024-3036
- ^{xi} Office of National Statistics (2024) [Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK: registered in 2022](#)
- ^{xii} Alcohol Toolkit Study (2024) [Monthly Tracking KPI](#) [Accessed 15th April 2024]; Piper, R. (2024) [Dry January 2024: Kick-starting a year of change?](#) *Alcohol Change UK* [Accessed 15th April 2024]