Factsheet: Alcohol - the Irish situation 2026

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Glossary of terms

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) – defined according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) criteria. It is a maladaptive pattern of alcohol use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by 2 or more of the following 11 criteria occurring at any time in the last 12 months: role impairment; hazardous use; social problems; tolerance; withdrawal; longer or more use than intended; unsuccessful attempts to quit/cut down; much time spent using alcohol; reduced activities because of drinking; continued drinking despite psychological or physical problems; and alcohol cravings.

Drug Prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that has used a named drug during a particular time period. That is, how many people in specific group have used a drug during a specified timeframe.

Heavy episodic drinking (HED) – sometimes referred to as 'binge drinking' and defined as consuming six or more standard drinks on a single occasion. This is approximately equivalent to three pints of beer or cider, six pub measures of spirits, or just under one bottle of wine.

Last month prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported using a named drug in the 30-day period prior to the survey. Last month prevalence is often referred to as current use. Some of those reporting current use may be occasional or first-time users who happen to have used in the period leading up to the survey, so current use is not the same as regular use.

Last year prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported using a named drug in the 12 months prior to the survey. Last year prevalence is often referred to as recent use.

Lifetime prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported ever having used a named drug before the time they were surveyed. A person who records lifetime prevalence may or may not be currently using the drug. Lifetime prevalence should not be interpreted as meaning that people have used a drug over a long period of time or that they will use the drug again in future.

What does alcohol do?

Alcohol affects different parts of the body, causing problems and illnesses such as cancer, liver disease and high blood pressure.[1]

Heart: Alcohol can damage the heart or interfere with the way it works if you have:

- a lot of alcohol over a long time
- too much on a single occasion

This can cause different problems, including:

- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- increased risk of strokes
- cardiomyopathy (stretching and drooping of the heart muscle)
- arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat)

Brain
Alcohol interferes with communication pathways in the brain. This causes the loss of control that happens when you are drunk. In the longer term, drinking too much alcohol can damage, shrink or kill brain cells. This can change the way the brain works.[1]

What is a standard drink in Ireland?

The standard drink in Ireland is 10 grams of pure alcohol.[2]

Below are some examples of a standard drink.

- A pub measure of spirits (35.5ml)
- A half pint of normal beer
- An alcopop (275ml bottle)
- A small glass of wine (12.5% volume)

A bottle of wine at 12.5% alcohol contains about seven standard drinks.

What are the low-risk drinking guidelines in Ireland?

Low risk weekly guidelines for adults are:[2]

- up to 11 standard drinks in a week for women, and
- up to 17 standard drinks in a week for men.

See more at Health Service Executive

How do we know how many people use alcohol in Ireland?

The Healthy Ireland survey is an annual survey designed to increase knowledge of the population's health and health behaviours.[3] It is commissioned by the Department of Health, carried out by Ipsos B&A, and conducted with a representative sample of the population of the Republic of Ireland aged 15 years and over. For the 2025 Survey, telephone interviews took place between October 2024 and April 2025 with 7,556 respondents. Questions about alcohol use are routinely asked in each wave of the survey.[3]

(See also CSO data Irish health survey 2025. For other populations, see our prevalence sources.)

How much alcohol do Irish people consume?

According to the Healthy Ireland survey 2025[3]:

- Seventy-one per cent of the population (78% of males and 74% of females) aged 15 years and over reported consuming alcohol in the previous 12 months.
- Drinking at least once a week was reported by 35% of respondents, see Table 1.
- 20% drink multiple times per week.
- Over one-quarter (26%) of the population reported heavy episodic drinking (HED) or binge drinking on a typical drinking occasion.
- There was a substantial gender difference in binge drinking prevalence: males (40%) were more likely to report binge drinking compared with females (12%), with younger people more likely to do so than older people (15-24 year olds: 36%, 75+ year olds: 7%).
- 25% of the population said that they drink non-alcoholic beer, wine or spirits.
- 56% of people who drink non-alcoholic drinks said they do so when they need to drive home. 29% said they drink them to reduce alcohol consumption for health reasons and 16% said they do when they need to get up early the next day and don't want a hangover. 13% said they drink non-alcoholic drinks because they prefer them to regular alcoholic drinks

Per capita alcohol use is the volume of pure alcohol consumed per person aged 15 years and over each year and is calculated in Ireland using alcohol sales data from Revenue and population estimates from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). In Ireland in 2025, alcohol consumption was 9.24 litres of pure alcohol per capita aged 15 years or older. This represents a fall of more than 16% since the passage of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act in 2018.[4]

See more alcohol data from Revenue quarterly excise receipts and volumes and annual report 2025.

How many 15–16-year-old students in Ireland use alcohol?

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) has conducted surveys of school-going children every four years since 1995, using a standardised method and a common questionnaire (see www.espad.org). The eight survey[5] was undertaken in 37 European countries during 2024 and collected information on alcohol, tobacco and other substance use among 15-16-asked about their alcohol use and intoxication in their lifetime, during the last 12 months, and in the last 30 days.

The study found that:

- 66.5% of students in Ireland used alcohol in their lifetime (66.1% of male and 67% female).
- 35.1% of students in Ireland used alcohol in last month (33.5% of male and 36.7% female).
- 3.5% of students had consumed five or more drinks once or twice in the last 30 days a further one in ten (9.7%) had done so at least three times.
- Students commonly sourced alcohol from parents (23.2%), from other youth (11.6%) and from a store/off-license (8.3%).
- Students were more likely to report that they use alcohol for the purpose of enjoyment and to enhance social activity.
- 71.4% of students who had skipped class on 5-6 days in the last 30 days were current drinkers.
- Students whose friends all used alcohol were far more likely to have ever tried it (93.7%).

For further information go to the ESPAD data portal where you can search for "alcohol" and filter by Ireland.

Health-related harms

According to the Healthy Ireland survey 2025[3]:

- 20% of the population are at risk of hazardous or harmful drinking. Of these, 18% have AUDIT scores between 8 to 15, 1% have scores between 16 to 19 indicating higher risk and a further 1% have scores of 20 or more, indicating a possible alcohol dependence.
- Men (29%) are more likely than women (11%) to be at risk of hazardous drinking (i.e. AUDIT score of 8 or higher). People aged 15 to 24 have the highest rate of hazardous drinking for both men (39%) and women (25%).
- People educated with a degree or higher (17%) are less likely to be at risk of hazardous drinking, whereas people educated to upper secondary level (25%) are more likely to.
- Students (46%) are more likely to be at risk of hazardous drinking, whereas those engaged in home duties (7%) and people in retirement (10%) are less likely to.
- 36% of people (51% of drinkers) drink alcohol at a harmful level. Men (47%) are more likely than women (25%) to drink at a harmful level.
- As with overall alcohol consumption, harmful drinking rates have decreased for both men and women since 2015. However, this decrease is not equally shared across all ages or genders. For instance, while both men and women aged 25 to 34 saw a considerable decrease in harmful drinking rates (22-points down for men and 13-points down for women), among those aged 15-24 there is an 8-point increase for women and no change for men in this age group.

In Ireland, the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) scheme collects data on discharges (including deaths) from acute Irish hospitals.

All alcohol-related discharges, either wholly attributable (alcohol is a necessary cause for these conditions to manifest) or partially attributable (alcohol must be a component cause), were analysed.

According to HIPE data[6], there were 22,572 alcohol-related discharges from Irish hospitals in 2023. HSE Dublin and North East (Area A) had the greatest number of alcohol-related hospital discharges (n=6,181) but this is expected due to the larger population within that area. There were 4,739 alcohol-related hospital discharges in HSE Dublin and Midlands (Area B) followed by 3,638 in HSE Dublin and South East (Area C). When considering the rate of alcohol-related hospital discharges per 100,000 of the population of each regional health area, the highest rate remained as HSE Dublin and North East (Area A) at 520.7 per 100,000 of the population.

The National Registry of Deliberate Self-Harm is a national system of population monitoring for the occurrence of deliberate self-harm, established by the National Suicide Research Foundation. In 2025 the NSHRI estimate 12,340 presentations made by 9,329 individuals to hospital as a result of self-harm. Alcohol was involved in 31% of all presentations and was more often involved in male than female presentations (37% and 26% respectively).[7]

How many people receive treatment for alcohol use?

The data are drawn from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) which is the national database that records and reports on treated problem alcohol and drug use in Ireland. Treatment is provided by statutory and non-statutory services, including residential centres, community-based addiction services, general practices, and prison services. The dataset contains information only on those who started treatment in a particular year (for the first time or returning to treatment). It does not include service users in continuous care. As there is currently no national system-wide unique identifier in the Irish health system, the NDTRS records cases of treatment. In any given year, individuals may appear more than once if treated in different centres or if they return

to treatment in the same centre. When someone in treatment has been using multiple drugs, one is identified as their 'main problem' drug.[8]

In 2025, 8,798 cases were treated for problem alcohol use, an increase of 7.1% when compared with 2023 and the highest annual total reported in over a decade, see Table 2.[8]

Of the 8,798 cases in 2025 who reported alcohol as their main problem drug:

- 3,790 (43.1%) were new cases.
- 5,566 (63.3%) were treated in outpatient facilities.
- 5,313 (60.4%) were men.
- 75 (0.9%) were aged under 18 years.
- Polydrug use (problem use of more than one substance) was reported by more than one-third 2,820 (32.1%) of cases.
- The number of polydrug cases reporting cocaine as an additional problem increased by 200.3% between 2017 and 2025, increasing from 607 cases in 2017 to 2,034 cases in 2025.

Table 1: Number of cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, by treatment status, NDTRS 2017 to 2025

	2017 N (%)	2018 N (%)	2019 N (%)	2020 N (%)	2021 N (%)	2022 N (%)	2023 N (%)	2024 N (%)	2025 N(%)
All cases	7,350	7,464	7,546	5,824	6,859	7,421	8,163	8,745	8,798
New Cases	3,500 (47.6)	3,230 (43.3)	3,296 (43.7)	2,490 (42.8)	3,026 (44.1)	3,278 (44.2)	3,625 (44.4)	3,800 (43.5)	3,790 (43.1)
Previously treated cases	3,652 (49.7)	3,705 (49.6)	3,400 (45.1)	3,170 (54.4)	3,596 (52.4)	3,868 (52.1)	4,527 (52.1)	4,619 (52.8)	4,662 (53.0)
Treatment status unknown	198 (2.7)	529 (7.1)	850 (11.3)	164 (2.8)	237 (3.5)	275 (3.7)	281 (3.4)	326 (3.7)	346 (3.9)

[For more detailed treatment data (age, gender, employment status) up to 2025 see library interactive tables]

Problem alcohol use

In 2025, over half 4,282 (48.7%) of all NDTRS cases were classified as alcohol dependent.[8]

- 43.5% (1,649) of new cases (those who have never been treated for problem alcohol use before) were classified as alcohol dependent.
- The proportion of previously treated cases who were alcohol dependent decreased from 78.5% in 2017 to 54.3% in 2025.

The National Psychiatric Inpatient Reporting System (NPIRS) provides detailed information on all admissions and discharges to inpatient psychiatric services in Ireland.[9] There has been a considerable decrease in the numbers admitted to psychiatric hospitals for alcohol treatment. The total number of people admitted to psychiatric hospitals with an alcohol-related disorder diagnosis in 2025 was 696.

Table 2. All admissions to psychiatric units and hospitals. Primary admission diagnosis: alcoholic disorders. Ireland 2018 - 2025. Numbers with rates per 100,000 total population.

	Male	Female	Total
	N (rate)	N (rate)	N (rate)
2025	446 (17.5)	339 (13.0)	785 (15.2)

	Male	Female	Total
2024	403 (15.8)	293 (11.2)	696 (13.5)
2023	385 (15.1)	221 (8.5)	606 (11.8)
2022	471 (20.0)	335 (13.9)	806 (16.9)
2021	462 (19.6)	296 (12.3)	758 (15.9)
2020	567 (24.1)	391 (16.2)	958 (20.1)
2019	635 (27.0)	455 (18.9)	1,090 (22.9)

Data drawn from National Psychiatric Inpatient Reporting System annual reports 2019 – 2025

Alcohol-related deaths

The main sources of information on alcohol-related mortality are the NDRDI and the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study. The National Drug-Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) [10] is a database which records cases of death by drug and alcohol poisoning, deaths among drug users and those who are alcohol dependent. The GBD study quantifies health loss from hundreds of diseases, injuries, and risk factors by combining the prevalence of a given disease or risk factor and the relative harm it causes. It can be used to measure alcohol-related harm, including deaths, and considers a wide range of variables in order to calculate the mortality associated with alcohol use.

According to the NDRDI in 2022 the number of alcohol-only poisonings was 67, and (47, 70.1%) of these deaths were among males. The median age of the deceased was 54 years.[10]
In 2022, 132 alcohol-related poisoning deaths were recorded. The majority of these were among males (91, 68.9%).

As the NDRDI does not include partially alcohol-attributable conditions, it indicates that on average, three people die every day in Ireland as a direct result of alcohol. The GBD study[4] includes partially alcohol-attributable deaths and estimates that there are at least four deaths per day in Ireland due to alcohol.

The GBD study ranked alcohol use as the eighth leading cause of death among the population in Ireland in 2019, with cirrhosis and other chronic liver diseases due to alcohol use causing the most wholly alcohol-attributable deaths, followed by AUD and liver cancer due to alcohol use. Partially alcohol-attributable deaths in 2019 were most commonly neoplasms, digestive diseases, and cardiovascular diseases. Provisional data from the NDRDI indicate that there were 146 alcohol poisoning deaths in Ireland in 2020.

The data available from the Road Safety Authority and NDRDI conclude that more than one-third of fatal road traffic collisions (RTCs) between 2013 and 2017 involved the road user having a positive toxicology for alcohol. Among driver fatalities with a positive toxicology for alcohol, the drivers were typically male, aged under 45 years.[4]

For more information on alcohol related deaths please see the 2024 overview Alcohol: availability, affordability, related harm, and policy

What impact has alcohol on crime in Ireland?

According to the 2024 report *Alcohol: availability, affordability, related harm, and policy in Ireland*:[4]

- In 2022, there were 5,527 recorded incidents of drink-driving (driving or being in charge of a vehicle while over the legal blood alcohol limit).
- There were just 26 incidents of purchasing or consumption of alcohol by those aged under 18 years and 237 liquor licensing incidents (which include the sale of alcohol without a valid licence, and breach of alcohol sales hours).
- A 12.5% increase was noted in the number of incidents for drunkenness, from 8,813 incidents in 2012 to 9,917 in 2022.
- In 2019, the majority of clients on probation supervision (81%) reported misusing alcohol and/or other drugs in their lifetime; 64% of the sample reported any alcohol misuse in their lifetime, 50% of whom reported combined alcohol and drug misuse and 14% of whom reported only alcohol misuse in their lifetime.
    - Clients' drug and/or alcohol use was linked to the offence committed for 42% of male probation service clients and 32% of female clients.
    - Of those who reported being binge drinkers, 61% committed an alcohol-related offence, this was 50% of harmful drinkers (50%) or 35% of dependent drinkers, indicating that binge drinking is particularly associated with criminal behaviour.

What does the law say about alcohol?

The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 seeks to address the negative impacts of consumption on public health. It contains a suite of measures designed to reduce alcohol consumption and limit the damage to the nation's health, society and economy.

The primary policy objectives of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 are to:
- reduce alcohol consumption to 9.1 litres of pure alcohol per person per annum
- delay the initiation of alcohol consumption by children and young people
- reduce the harms caused by the misuse of alcohol
- ensure the supply and price of alcohol is regulated and controlled in order to minimise the possibility and incidence of alcohol related harm

Measures that have been implemented to date include structural separation, the regulation of sports sponsorship, restrictions on certain promotional activities and minimum unit pricing.
Regulations were signed in May 2023 to introduce comprehensive health labelling of alcohol products sold in Ireland. The law provides that the labels of alcohol products will state the calorie content and grams of alcohol in the product. They will warn about the risk of consuming alcohol when pregnant and will also warn of the risk of liver disease and fatal cancers from alcohol consumption. There is a lead-in time built into the law in order to give businesses significant time to prepare for the change. The law will apply from 22 May 2026.

See more at Alcohol Action Ireland *What is the public health (alcohol) Act?*

The Road Traffic Act 2006 gave the Gardai the powers to reduce and eliminate the offence of drink driving. See more at Citizens Information

Intoxicating Liquor Acts
- It is an offence to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18.
- It is an offence to buy alcohol for people under the age of 18.
- It is also an offence to give alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 unless in a domestic home and they have parental consent.

See more at Citizens Information

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Further resources:

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- Health Information and Quality Authority. (2026) A systematic review on the association between alcohol consumption and mental health outcomes. Dublin: HIQA

Useful websites:

- HRB National Drugs Library http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/
- Alcohol Action Ireland http://alcoholireland.ie/
- Alcohol Forum Ireland http://www.alcoholforum.org/

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