Alcohol Consumption Linked to Cancer Incidence and Mortality in All States

Findings call for implementation of policies and cancer control efforts to reduce alcohol consumption.

January 20, 2021 By American Cancer Society

A new study finds that alcohol consumption accounts for a considerable portion of cancer incidence and mortality in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The article, which appears in Cancer Epidemiology, states that the proportion of cancer cases attributable to alcohol consumption ranged from a high of 6.7% in Delaware to a low of 2.9% in Utah. Similarly, Delaware had the highest proportion of alcohol-related cancer deaths (4.5%) and Utah had the lowest (1.9%).

This study conducted by Farhad Islami, MD, PhD, and colleagues at the American Cancer Society is the first to estimate contemporary proportions and counts of alcohol-attributable cancer cases and deaths for all states. Data shows the proportions were generally higher in New England and Western states and lower in Midwestern and Southern states.

“This information is important for prioritizing state-level cancer prevention and control efforts to reduce alcohol consumption and the burden of alcohol-related cancers,” said Islami.

The proportion of alcohol-related cancers was far greater for some individual cancer types. For oral cavity/pharyngeal cancer cases, for example, it ranged from 36% in Utah to 62.5% in Delaware and was 45% or more in 45 states and the District of Columbia. By sex, alcohol-related cancer cases and deaths for most evaluated cancer types were higher among men, in part reflecting higher levels of alcohol consumption among men.

In the U.S. on average, alcohol consumption accounted for 4.8% of cancer cases and 3.2% of cancer deaths, or about 75,200 cancer cases and 18,950 cancer deaths annually, during 2013 to 2016.

In addition, the authors say, “healthcare providers and public health practitioners can educate the community to expand the currently limited awareness of the cancer-related risks of alcohol consumption.” The American Cancer Society’s guideline for Diet and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention states that it is best not to consume alcohol; for those who do drink, consumption should be limited to no more than 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men.

This article was originally released on January 19, 2021, by the American Cancer Society. It is republished with permission.

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