



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 April 18

CANADA'S LOW-RISK ALCOHOL DRINKING GUIDELINES VIDEO

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 050-13 re "Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines Video" be received for information.

Key Points

- Alcohol is related to numerous chronic and acute health conditions and also has negative social implications.
- High-risk alcohol consumption in Middlesex-London remains unacceptably high.
- Canada's new Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRDG) aim to increase knowledge in order moderate alcohol consumption.
- The Health Unit has created a video to deliver the LRDG message to our community.

Background

The harmful use of alcohol is a leading risk factor for premature death and disabilities and is considered a serious public health issue. Alcohol is associated with numerous chronic (e.g. cardiovascular disease and cancer) and acute (e.g. injury and alcohol poisoning) health problems. In a recent study, a high level of alcohol consumption was shown to decrease life expectancy by about two years compared to the Ontario average, whereas avoiding the unhealthy use of alcohol has been shown to increase life expectancy by up to three years. High levels of alcohol consumption also contribute to significant social harms, which along with the health consequences result in considerable economic impacts.

The proportion of adults consuming alcohol in Ontario is high and has increased significantly between 2010 and 2011 from 78% to 81.2%. Middlesex County and City of London alcohol consumption rates are fairly similar to those in Ontario as identified in the Health Unit's [Community Health Status Resource](#):

- The proportion of adults aged 19 and older in Middlesex-London who exceeded the Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRDG) (see below) in 2009/2010 was 33.4%. Although not statistically significant, this rate was higher in Middlesex-London compared to Ontario and peer health units. It should be noted that the proportion of the population 19 years of age and older who report consuming alcohol at levels that exceed Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRDG) is an indicator that is monitored under the Accountability Agreement between health units and the province.
- 18% of the Middlesex-London population reported monthly binge drinking (5 or more drinks) in 2009/2010.

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines

Canada's first LRDG were released at the end of 2011, with the endorsement of many public and private agencies. The guidelines are intended for Canadians of legal drinking age who choose to drink alcohol.

Their purpose is to provide consistent information across the country to help Canadians moderate their alcohol consumption and reduce the immediate and long-term alcohol-related harms. They provide information on what is considered a standard drink, how to drink to reduce health risks (always recognizing that less is best), and when not drinking at all is recommended.

As per the Ontario Public Health Standards, Health Unit staff members strive to increase awareness about the harmful effects of alcohol and influence the behaviour of people who consume or may consume alcohol. By increasing the community's knowledge of the risks associated with alcohol and the ways to help reduce those risks, the Health Unit aims to increase the public's capacity to prevent alcohol misuse and its associated harms. The LRDG are an important tool to assist in increasing knowledge and reducing risk. Both provincial and local research has confirmed that a significant proportion of the public is unaware of the LRDG message, has limited knowledge of the connection between alcohol and chronic health problems, and is drinking beyond the LRDG.

Video Development/Dissemination

Pamphlets, posters, and a background research paper were created by the National Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines working group with the release of the new guidelines. Given the complexity of the LRDG message, Health Unit staff sought an alternative approach to provide the low-risk alcohol health message to our community. Research has found that videos can be effective teaching tools to increase awareness and knowledge. By incorporating visual and auditory information into a teaching tool, individuals are able to understand and retain the knowledge. In addition, local data from the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) survey indicates that the Middlesex-London community would prefer to receive LRDG information via the internet versus other methods.

As a result, at the end of 2012, the "[Understanding Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines](#)" video was created in collaboration with the London-based company, CIVA Communications. Extensive distribution of the video has resulted in significant attention from community partners, peer health units and influential organizations like the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. The video has also been shared with many of the community's workplaces and healthcare providers.

Next Steps

To advance the Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines message in the community, the Health Unit is collaborating with the other eight health units in Southwest Ontario to develop a regional campaign called "Rethink Your Drinking". The campaign plans to phase in five alcohol topics over a 12-month period including standard drink size, low-risk drinking guideline limits, gender differences, injury association, and chronic disease connection to alcohol. It will have eye catching posters and giveaways that will drive the public and media to a new Southwest Ontario alcohol website www.rethinkyourdrinking.ca which will contain alcohol-specific information, links, and the "[Understanding Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines](#)" video. The scheduled launch date for the Southwest regional campaign is May 2013.

This report was prepared by Ms. Mary Lou Albanese, Manager, Healthy Communities and Injury Prevention Team and Ms. Melissa Knowler, Public Health Nurse.



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<p>This report addresses the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Program Standards: Prevention of Injury and Substance Misuse and Chronic Diseases and Injuries</p>
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