

# Alcohol and COVID-19: what you need to know



**Under no circumstances should you drink any type of alcoholic product as a means of preventing or treating COVID-19 infection**

## Consumption of alcohol will not protect you from COVID-19

Alcohol is a harmful substance that has an adverse effect on almost every single organ of your body, and the risk of damage to your health increases with each drink consumed. Alcohol use, especially heavy use, weakens the immune system and reduces its ability to cope with infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Heavy alcohol use is a risk factor for acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), one of the most severe complications of COVID-19.

Alcohol also alters your thoughts, judgement, decision-making and behaviour, and is associated with injuries and violence, including interpersonal violence such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, youth violence, elder abuse, and violence against children. Alcohol consumption may intensify fear, anxiety or depression, especially when people are in isolation, and should not be used as a coping strategy to deal with stress.

### General myths about alcohol and COVID-19



*Myth* Consuming alcohol destroys the virus that causes COVID-19.

**Fact** **Consuming alcohol will not destroy the virus**, and its consumption is likely to increase the health risks if a person becomes infected with the virus. Alcohol (at a concentration of at least 60% by volume) works as a disinfectant on your skin, but it has no such effect within your system when ingested.

*Myth* Drinking strong alcohol kills the virus in the inhaled air.

**Fact** **Consumption of alcohol will not kill the virus in the inhaled air**; it will not disinfect your mouth and throat; and it will not give you any kind of protection against COVID-19.

*Myth* Alcohol (beer, wine, distilled spirits or herbal alcohol) stimulates immunity and resistance to the virus.

**Fact** **Alcohol has a deleterious effect on your immune system** and will not stimulate immunity and virus resistance.

## Alcohol: what to do, and what not to do, during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Avoid alcohol altogether so that you do not undermine your own immune system and health and do not risk the health of others.
- If you do not drink, do not let any supposed health reason or claim persuade you to start.
- If you drink, keep your drinking to a minimum and avoid getting intoxicated.
- Do not use alcohol as a way of dealing with your emotions and stress. Isolation and drinking may also increase the risk of suicide. Please call a health hotline if you have suicidal thoughts.
- Reach out for help online if you think your drinking or the drinking of someone close to you is out of control.
- Avoid alcohol as a social cue for smoking, and vice versa, as smoking is associated with more complicated and dangerous progression of COVID-19.
- Never mix alcohol with medications, even herbal or over-the-counter remedies, as this could make them less effective, or it might increase their potency to a level where they become toxic and dangerous.
- Do not consume alcohol if you take any medication acting on the central nervous system (e.g. pain killers, sleeping tablets, anti-depressants, etc), as alcohol might interfere with your liver function and cause liver failure or other serious problems.
- Avoid stockpiling alcohol at home, as this will potentially increase your alcohol consumption and the consumption of others in your household.
- Make sure that children and young people do not have access to alcohol and do not let them see you consume alcohol – be a role model.
- Discuss with children and young people the problems associated with drinking and COVID-19, such as violations of quarantine and physical distancing, which can make the pandemic worse.
- Monitor the screen time of your children, as TV and other media are flooded with alcohol advertising and misinformation that may stimulate early initiation and increased consumption.

**Stay sober so that you can remain vigilant, act quickly and make decisions with a clear head, for yourself and others in your family and community**

