



WORKING TO BUILD A HEALTHY AUSTRALIA
www.nhmrc.gov.au

Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking —FAQs

Q. What is a safe level of drinking?

A. The revised *Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking* (The Guidelines) do not represent a ‘safe’ or ‘no-risk’ drinking level; neither is it a prescriptive level of drinking that must be followed in all situations. Rather, it is an advisory drinking level that will enable healthy adults to maintain a low risk of alcohol-related accidents, injuries, diseases and death.

Q. What are they for?

A. The Guidelines are intended to provide population level advice to the community to allow people to make informed decisions about their own alcohol consumption based on the latest scientific evidence available at the time of the review.

Q. What will this document be used for?

A. This document is a draft, released for community consultation on 12 Oct 2007. Once finalised the guidelines will provide a valuable resource for a wide range of groups and individuals,—including health professionals, community groups, professional and educational organisations, policy makers, the general public and those businesses responsible for providing alcohol.

Note: When these guidelines are finalised, the Department of Health and Ageing will be managing a national campaign to ensure the messages of the responsible use of alcohol are brought to the community,

Q. Who wrote the new draft guidelines?

A. The National Health and Medical Research Council brought together Australian experts—with experience in treatment, general practice and research.

Q. How did the NHMRC know what to change?

A. The NHMRC commissioned a systematic search and analysis of the literature in this subject. Thus, the draft guidelines are underpinned by the latest scientific research.

Q. What's different about the new draft guidelines?

A. In the previous guidelines, two levels of drinking above guideline levels were designated as 'risky' and 'high risk', respectively. These terms are not used in this draft because risk increases progressively with the amount of alcohol consumed. For this reason, the draft guidelines take the new approach of recommending a level of alcohol consumption to ensure low risk of harm.

Any drinking above the guideline levels therefore carries a higher risk than not drinking, as shown by both the risk of injury and disease compared to not drinking, and the lifetime risks of specific patterns and levels of drinking.

Q. What has changed from the previous alcohol guidelines?

A. The previous eleven (11) guidelines have been simplified to three guidelines and some additional health advice. (see questions below)

Q. What are the three guidelines?

A. • *A single, universal guideline* for all Australian adults that presents a recommended drinking level to reduce the risks of short and long-term harms (**Guideline 1**).
• *Two guidelines with special precautions* for children and adolescents, and for pregnant and breastfeeding women (**Guidelines 2 and 3**).

Q. What is the additional health advice?

A. The additional health advice contains precautions for specific groups of adults who have an increased risk (such as young adults, older people, people with a family history of alcohol dependence), for people with physical or mental conditions made worse by drinking, and for specific situations (such as taking part in high-risk activities or using illicit drugs).

Q. What about pregnancy and drinking?

A. For women who are pregnant, hoping to become pregnant, or breastfeeding the safest choice—based on scientific evidence—is not to drink alcohol.

Q. What is the safest level for young people under 18?

A. For young people the safest choice—based on scientific evidence—is not to drink alcohol. If older teenagers do drink, then it should be under adult supervision and within the adult guideline for low-risk drinking (two standard drinks in any one day).

Q. What about the research that alcohol has been reported to reduce the risks of cardiovascular disease in older men and women as well as having other health benefits!

A. Any health benefits need to be balanced against the risks of other chronic diseases at low levels of drinking alcohol. The guidelines do not encourage people who do not already drink alcohol to take up drinking just to get some health benefits.

Q. Has the ‘standard drink’ changed from the previous guidelines?

A. No—a standard drink is still 10 grams of alcohol.

Q. Will Australia be out of step with the rest of the world?

A. No. There is no international standard for “standard drink” or for safe or unsafe drinking levels. Appendix 3 provides a helpful comparison of international standards.

Q. Is a standard drink different to a serving of alcohol?

A. Yes—it is important to note that the serving size of drinks is often more than one standard drink. There are no common glass sizes used in Australia.

How much is a standard drink?

Can /Stubbie light beer	= 0.8 standard drink
Can/Stubbie medium light beer	= 1 standard drink
Can/Stubbie regular beer	= 1.5 standard drinks
100ml wine (9 to 13% alcohol)	= 1 standard drink
30ml nip spirits	= 1 standard drink
Can spirits (approx 5% alcohol)	= 1.5 to 2.5 standard drinks

Q. Are there any other special considerations/precautions when consuming alcohol?

A. Yes—a range of health advice is presented to certain situations including:

- mixing alcohol and illicit drugs
- taking part in risky activities or supervising risky activities
- brain development of young adults up to the age of 25 years and alcohol;
- balancing chronic conditions in older people and the benefits of a small amount of alcohol
- people with a family history of alcohol dependence
- in addition, it is recommended that people with physical health problems, mental health problems and/or taking medications should seek professional advice from their doctor.

Q. How long is the public consultation process and what does it entail?

- A. The closing date for consultation is 11 December 2007—60 days. The NHMRC is inviting interested people and organisations to send in their comments on the draft guidelines. There is no set format and no minimum or maximum length. It is most helpful if people include the page/paragraph they are commenting on and full details of any references they rely on.