ALCOHOL AND COVID-19 IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Alcohol consumption and harms in the Americas pre-COVID-19

- The Americas has the **second highest average of alcohol per capita consumption** (8.0 L) after Europe (10 L), also above the global average (6 L)

- The Americas has the **lowest level of abstention** in the world: In 2016, 46.1% of the adult population (15+) drank in the past year

- 25% of the general population are **heavy episodic drinkers**

- Highest prevalence of **Alcohol Use Disorders** for women and second for men

- In 2016, there were a total of **379,000 alcohol attributable deaths** in the Americas (5.5% of all deaths) and **18.9 million DALYs** (6.7% of all DALYs)
Alcohol use as a risk factor for seven of the eight leading causes of death among 15-49-year-olds in the Americas in 2016
Status of national written alcohol policy in 2016 for countries in the Americas

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Alcohol Policy Scores for the 10 areas of the Global Strategy

1 Leadership, awareness & action
2 Health services' response
3 Community & workplace action
4 Drink-driving policies & countermeasures
5 Availability of alcohol
6 Marketing of alcoholic beverages
7 Pricing policies
8 Negative consequences of drinking
9 Illicit & informal alcohol
10 Monitoring & surveillance

Composite Indicator Score

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Alcohol Policy Action area
Alcohol and COVID-19
Spread of Misinformation with the pandemic

• Consuming alcohol destroys the virus
• Drinking strong alcohol kills the virus in the inhaled air
• Alcohol stimulates immunity and resistance to the virus
• Perpetuating a message of “sympathy”, that it is ok, understandable, for people to drink to cope with the current situation, that they can at least drink...
HOW PAHO RESPONDED

• FACT SHEETS and SOCIAL MEDIA tiles for the public (with EURO)

• 2 Editorials in scientific journals

• Over 10 webinars in E, S, P

• Facebook live sessions with countries and globally

• Regional online survey: report and 2 scientific publications
PAHO Regional Survey on Alcohol and COVID-19

• Implemented by PAHO in May-June 2020 (early in the pandemic)
• Participants from 33 countries in the Region
• 12,328 valid responses
• Questions included: Demographics, COVID-19 measures, pre-pandemic alcohol consumption, current pandemic alcohol consumption and mental health impacts over the last 14-days
PAHO Regional Survey on alcohol and COVID-19

Key Survey Results:

• Overall decrease in consumption 2020
• A trend towards the consumption of stronger alcohol products
• Decrease in overall prevalence but increase in frequency of illicit and informal alcohol consumption
• Overwhelming majority did not seek help for reducing drinking (before and by the time of the survey)
Seeking help to reduce consumption

* From March to June 2020, during the pandemic.
Prevalence of Heavy Episodic Drinking (HED) by Sex

* Chi-square tests between years (2019 vs. 2020) and between genders were significant for the total sample; $P < 0.001$

** From March to June 2020, during the pandemic.
Change in Frequency of HED by Sex from 2019 to 2020*

- HED more prevalent in higher income groups
- HED more prevalent among 18-39 years and males
- HED was associated with more negative MH feelings
- HED was associated with quarantine measures

* From March to June 2020, during the pandemic.
** Chi-square test between the change in frequency of HED and genders was significant; $P < 0.001$

HED before and did not change!
Impact of COVID-19 on alcohol use, harms and policy

We need to assess and evaluate various scenarios!

Pandemic potential impacts:

- Both increases and decreases in consumption
- Reduction of public violence (road injuries, in public venues and locations)
- Increase in domestic violence and child abuse*
- Increased exposure of young people to drinking and online marketing and promotions (norm changing)
- Less access to treatment and services
- Alcohol-related diseases could be linked to severe COVID-19

Factors for increased consumption:

- Anxiety, stress, boredom
- Increase in free time
- “Multitasking”: work, kids, house, care giving
- Increased online marketing, home deliveries
- Loosening of restrictions to access alcohol
- Online marketing
- Increased availability and affordability

Factors for decreased consumption:

- Reduction in availability
- Reduction in affordability
- Reduction in public drinking
- Reduction in drinking opportunities for youth in sports/shows

Sources:

Finlay. BMJ 2020;369:m1987 doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1987
Monteiro et al, in press (JSAD, 2020)
Source: Alcohol use in times of the COVID 19: Implications for monitoring and policy
New frontiers for alcohol policy

- Challenge to regulate E-Commerce and online marketing and sales
- Keep and strengthen current policies
- Accelerate training of health professionals on alcohol-related issues
- Increase telehealth for Alcohol Use Disorders and Alcohol Brief Interventions
- Increase health literacy on alcohol (using new tools such as social media and reliable sources)
- Balance economic and public health interests moving forward out of the pandemic
- Promote alcohol policy preparedness and response for public health emergencies in the future
- PREPARE-PREVENT-PROTECT-PROMOTE-PARTICIPATE

#UniversalHealth
Questions?
Thank you!

www.paho.org

#HealthForAll
#MentalHealth
#GetVax
#pahowho
#BeatNCDs
#UniversalHealth