

Harmful drinkers will see biggest impact from minimum unit price for alcohol – new research shows

In October, the Welsh Government unveiled a new Bill that will, if passed by the National Assembly for Wales, introduce a minimum price for the sale of alcohol. The Bill is designed to tackle the health impacts of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Sheffield Alcohol Research Group at the University of Sheffield were commissioned by the Welsh Government in June 2017 to update the 2014 model-based appraisal of the likely impact of a range of minimum unit pricing policies in Wales.

The research published today is an interim report which updates the modelling undertaken by the University of Sheffield in 2014, and provides an analysis of the health impacts of a 50 pence minimum unit price, as an illustrative example, for comparison with that used in the 2014 report.

The research shows that harmful drinkers purchase almost half (46%) of their alcohol for less than 50p per unit. They account for 4% of the drinker population, they drink 27% of, and are responsible for 20% of all spending on, all alcohol consumed in Wales.

In contrast, moderate drinkers purchase less than a quarter (22%) of their alcohol for less than 50p per unit which means it is estimated moderate drinkers would only spend £8.30 extra per year under a 50p MUP.

The research also shows:

- A 50p MUP is estimated to avoid 66 deaths and 1,281 hospital admissions per year
- Harmful drinkers in the most deprived areas make up 0.6% of the drinker population, the modelling estimates that they will experience 45% of the averted alcohol-attributable deaths and 24% of the averted alcohol-attributable hospital admissions
- Almost three quarters of drinkers drink within the UK Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of 14 units/week, however 24% of drinkers are drinking at potentially hazardous levels (14-50 units/week for men and 14-35 for women), and over 4% are harmful drinkers (over 50 units/week for men and 35 for women)
- Very little alcohol is sold in the on-trade (pubs and restaurants) at below the example 50p MUP threshold (less than 1% of all sales), but a significant proportion of off-trade (off-licences) alcohol is (46%), and overall 37% of all units drunk are bought for less than 50p.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“This research is further evidence that there is a very clear and direct link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol.

“The introduction of a minimum unit price will have a clear impact on those who drink harmful and hazardous levels of cheap, strong alcohol. It is also expected to make an important contribution to addressing health inequalities by improving the health outcomes of hazardous and harmful drinkers living in the most deprived areas of Wales.

“All alcohol-attributable deaths are avoidable deaths – so by introducing this measure, we will save lives.”