

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

What have we learned from COVID-19 and what needs to be done moving forward?



www.shaap.org.uk

Responses to COVID-19

- “Lockdown” likely to impact and isolate people already drinking heavily
- Responses to the pandemic impacted the ability of alcohol treatment and recovery services to function properly
- SHAAP produces advice for heavy drinkers thinking about cutting back or stopping drinking alcohol

- For people to understand their drinking levels and avoid serious alcohol withdrawal symptoms should they plan to reduce or stop drinking.
- Advice on which services to help with alcohol detox and reduction were providing telephone and online advice in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Practical tips and guidance for people planning to reduce or stop drinking about how to track their consumption levels and cut down in a planned and safe way.

<https://www.shaap.org.uk/downloads/reports-and-briefings/240-covid-advice-for-heavy-drinkers.html>

SHAAP

SCOTTISH HEALTH ACTION ON ALCOHOL PROBLEMS
www.shaap.org.uk

Advice for heavy drinkers who are thinking about cutting back or stopping drinking alcohol



▶ Is this advice for me?

This advice is intended to help you understand your drinking levels and avoid any serious alcohol withdrawal symptoms, should you plan to reduce or stop your drinking in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to help you cut back in a planned way in order to improve your health in the short and long term.

It is important that you know that both the risks of continuing a high level of drinking and of harms from cutting back are higher, the more heavily you drink. If there are alcohol support services available and you are planning to reduce your drinking, you should use these, particularly if you are drinking over 30 units per day, which is around a bottle of spirits, 3 bottles of wine, 7 cans of strong lager (7.5% or more) or 4 litres of white cider. Withdrawal symptoms and complications are more likely at this very high level of consumption.

The support available from NHS and other services to help with alcohol detox and reduction for people who wish to do this will be reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, though some services will be able to provide telephone and online advice. There is further information at the end of this guidance.

This advice is to help you, your families and friends self-manage alcohol reduction and/or withdrawal as safely as possible. If you are on your own with children, you will need extra support. If possible, you should speak to any professional who is supporting your family and get advice from your local addiction service before you start to cut down.

Lessons from the pandemic

- The pandemic has accelerated the trend towards home drinking, which involves more potential risks.
- Research indicates that heavier drinkers have increased their consumption as a result of lockdown.
- The closure of services in the wake of lockdown highlighted the patchiness of our already existing service landscape.

- The Scottish Government must meet its commitments as laid out in the 2018 *Alcohol Framework*, and make alcohol a public health priority going forward.
- Treatment services and support for recovery must be improved in the wake of COVID-19. We need better collaboration, co-ordination and integration between NHS Scotland, local ADPs and those with lived experience.

<https://www.shaap.org.uk/downloads/reports-and-briefings/251-shaap-msp-briefing-alcohol-and-covid19-jun20.html>



- The alcohol industry should be strongly encouraged to contribute to reducing alcohol harms by sharing their knowledge of sales volumes and patterns, both during the lockdown and beyond.

Moving forward for better health

- Focus on what needs to happen now for alcohol policy if we are to “build forward for better health in Scotland”
- Manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.
- Alcohol-related harm has implications for multiple areas of physical and mental health, the long-term resilience of our health and care services, and the economy.

Thank you!

Dr Elizabeth Hurst-High

SHAAP Policy Officer

shaap@rcpe.ac.uk