



Alcohol-Associated Liver Deaths on Rise in Women, Young Adults, Indigenous People

Pandemic-fueled drinking has contributed significantly to alcohol-related liver disease.

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A study has found that deaths from [alcohol-related liver diseases](#) are impacting women, young adults and Indigenous people at accelerated rates, according to [Stat News](#).

Alcohol-related liver disease (ALD) is the result of [liver](#) damage caused by heavy consumption of alcohol. ALD is a major reason for [liver transplantation](#) in the United States and the most common cause of alcohol-induced deaths.

ALD encompasses varying degrees of alcohol-related liver injury. These are categorized into three stages:

- Alcohol-related fatty liver disease;
- Alcohol-related hepatitis;
- Chronic hepatitis with hepatic fibrosis or cirrhosis.

Published in [JAMA Network Open](#), the study of 436,814 ALD deaths between 1999 and 2022 highlights the surge in deaths during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a trend that has continued to impact health in the recent years.

Between 1999 and 2022, the overall ALD death rate increased from 6.7 deaths per 100,000 to 12.5 deaths per 100,000. What's more, between 2018 and 2022, deaths increased 9% compared with 3.5% between 2006 and 2018.

While men accounted for most of these deaths (17 per 100,000 people), the death rate for women increased significantly from 3 deaths per 100,000 people to 8 per 100,000 people, according to Stat.

What's more, the annual percentage increase in women's mortality on average was 4.3%, nearly twice that of men.

The ALD practice guidelines issued by the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases say that men who drink 60 to 80 grams of alcohol per day for 10 or more years are at risk of developing severe scarring of the liver, or cirrhosis. Women, however, are at risk with as little as 20 grams per day in the same time span.

American Indian and Alaska Native communities also saw an increase in death rates, from about 25 per 100,000 people to nearly 47 per 100,000 people over the study period. Deaths among Black people initially decreased during the study period but sharply spiked starting in 2019 and increased by about 21% per year through 2022, according [to Axios](#).

Researchers also reported an uptick in the number of younger people ages 25 to 44 years with severe liver illness due to excessive drinking.

"It puts numbers to what we're seeing in the hospital, in the clinic," Brian Lee, MD, a hepatologist and liver transplant specialist at Keck Medicine of USC, who was not involved with the study, told Stat.

Additionally, researchers found that between 1999 and 2022, cirrhosis mortality rates more than doubled, with 9.5 deaths per 100,000 people. In women, cirrhosis deaths more than tripled, up to nearly 6 deaths per 100,000 people.

Researchers note that alcohol-related cirrhosis can take years to develop, meaning that the full extent of the consequences may not be seen for another five to 10 years.

"These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted public health interventions and enhanced surveillance, especially given the sustained impact of COVID-19 pandemic-related changes in alcohol consumption patterns," wrote the study's authors.

To learn more, click [#Alcohol-Related Liver Disease](#) or read Hep's [Health Basics on Alcohol-Related Liver Disease](#). It reads in part:

What causes ALD?

Alcohol-related liver disease is caused by drinking more alcohol than the liver can process. How much that is depends on the individual and the amount and frequency of alcohol use. Before discussing how much alcohol may cause ALD, here are standard measurements used in the United States to measure the amount of alcohol in drinks. A standard drink contains about 14 grams of alcohol. This is equivalent to:

- 12 ounces of regular beer;
- 5 ounces of wine;
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.

What are the symptoms of ALD?

Fatigue, feeling weak and abdominal discomfort are the most common symptoms of alcohol-related liver disease, but some people may not have any complaints. Lab tests may determine whether liver enzymes, including ALT and AST, are elevated, an indication of a liver problem. However, a person with alcohol-related fatty liver disease may have normal liver enzymes.

If alcohol-related liver disease has progressed to hepatitis or cirrhosis, symptoms may include significant fatigue, appetite loss and various gastrointestinal complaints, such as nausea, vomiting and pain. People may develop fevers and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes). Urine may turn a dark yellow or tea color, and stools may be pale gray or whitish.