



Liver Disease and Transplant Rates Increase From Drinking During Pandemic

Alcohol-related liver disease is now the number one reason for liver transplants, surpassing hepatitis C and fatty liver disease.

October 23, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

Doctors believe excessive drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the increased rate of [alcohol-associated liver disease](#) (AALD) and [liver transplants](#) in the United States, [ABC News](#) reports.

Many transplant centers throughout the country have reported more patients requiring liver transplants than ever before, according to ABC News. At some centers, the rate of patients needing transplants has doubled compared to rates prior to the pandemic.

What's more, the increasing number of patients who require transplants are younger than ever before. Historically, older men in their 60s were the main demographic for liver transplants. Now, doctors report patients in their 20s and 30s in need of transplants. There has also been an increase in the number of women needing transplants, according to [ABC News](#).

In California, cases of AALD rose by more than 60% from 2019 to 2021 and have not dropped back to pre-pandemic levels, according to [findings presented last year](#) at the AASLD Liver Meeting. In fact, AALD is now the [most common reason](#) people require liver transplants, surpassing other conditions such as [hepatitis C](#) and [fatty liver disease](#).

"It's a nationwide phenomenon where, since the pandemic, there has been a notable increase in alcohol use, including harmful alcohol use where there is associated liver disease, and it has led to increased hospitalization of patients with liver injury due to alcohol," Maarouf Hoteit, MD, medical director of liver transplants at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, told ABC News.

At UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital, prior to the pandemic, about 40% of patients with liver disease due to alcohol who were screened weekly needed a transplant. Today, between 80% and 90% of patients screened weekly need a transplant, according to ABC News.

Hoteit noted that the stress and isolation the pandemic caused likely contributed to increased

drinking. The pandemic also altered the culture of drinking, making drinking outside of evenings or the weekends more acceptable.

Stigma surrounding AALD may also prevent people from seeking help. Hoteit emphasizes the need for increased mental health and substance abuse assistance resources for people with AALD.

“Everybody deserves a second chance,” he said. “And there’s a potential to help a lot more patients if we focus away from the stigma and focus on truly addressing this issue as a health care problem.”

To read more, click [#Alcohol](#) or [#Liver Transplant](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Troubled U.S. Organ Transplant System Gets Major Revamp](#),” “[Abstaining From Alcohol Improves Outcomes in People With Cirrhosis](#)” and “[Alcohol-Related Liver Disease Rose Sharply During the Pandemic](#).”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/liver-disease-transplant-rates-increase-drinking-pandemic>