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New research reveals how Welsh drinking habits have changed during lockdown

New research commissioned by charity Alcohol Change UK has found that more than a quarter (27%) of adults in Wales who drink alcohol are drinking more often since lockdown began on 23 March. But more than one in three (36%) have reduced how often they drink or stopped drinking altogether.

The survey of 530 people in Wales suggests that lockdown is changing the way that the UK drinks at both ends of the scale, with 7% of adults in Wales who previously drank alcohol having stopped drinking completely for the lockdown.

These figures suggest that 550,000 adults in Wales are drinking more frequently since lockdown, while over 750,000 are drinking less often or have stopped drinking entirely. The same poll carried out UK-wide suggests that as many as 8.6 million people are drinking more often, and 14 million drinking less or have stopped completely.

People in Wales appear to be slightly more likely than the UK-wide average to have changed their drinking habits since lockdown, with 21% of UK adults drinking more and 35% drinking less or not at all.

More than one in three (43%) drinkers or past drinkers in Wales said that they are taking active steps to manage their drinking, suggesting that there is an awareness that lockdown might lead us to drink more frequently or heavily and that many are keen to keep their drinking healthy. People reported:

- Taking drink-free days (20%)
- Being careful with the amount of alcohol they buy (14%)
- Stopping drinking completely for the lockdown (7%)
- Seeking advice online (2%)

That said, it is the people who were already drinking the least often who have cut down in the greatest number. More than half (52%) of people who drank once a week or less have cut down or stopped drinking, compared to just under a quarter (22%) of people who drank two to six times a week. Worryingly, we heard from 24 people who drank everyday, and eight of them said they have further increased the amount they drink.

Andrew Misell, Director of Alcohol Change UK in Wales, said:

"More than a quarter of us in Wales are finding ourselves drinking more frequently in lockdown; many of us use alcohol as our go-to stress reliever, and in this very stressful time it's not surprising that we might find ourselves reaching for a drink more often.

"But at the same time *more* of us are taking steps to manage our drinking. More than a third of us are putting in place ways to keep our drinking in hand, ranging from taking drink-free days to seeking support online. We want to come out of lockdown as mentally and physically healthy as we possibly can, and managing our drinking is an important part of that.

“People who are drinking more may be struggling the most when it comes to managing their drinking. If you need more support you can find it even during lockdown; visit our coronavirus and alcohol information and advice hub to find out more.”

Many people appear to be seeking help when it comes to managing their drinking, with visits to the ‘Get help now’ section of Alcohol Change UK’s website increasing more than fourfold (355%) between 23 March and 13 April compared to the same period last year. In this period the charity has seen more than 11,000 visitors to its [coronavirus and alcohol information and advice hub](#).

Additional finding: 200,000 adults in Wales are living in households where alcohol is leading to greater tension or conflict during lockdown

The new research suggests that one person’s drinking can and does impact the whole household. More than one in 13 (8%) people said that their own or someone else’s drinking had made the tension in their household worse since lockdown.

The figures are even higher for households with children. One in seven (15%) people with children under 18 living in their household reported that alcohol had increased tensions, while only 5% felt alcohol had lessened tensions.

Dr Richard Piper said:

“This research shows that alcohol is leading to increased tension in millions of households across the UK, which hints at the wider negative impact that alcohol can have. Alcohol is a factor in around 55,000 hospital admissions and 1,500 deaths each year in Wales alone. This harm is avoidable. Taking action on alcohol harm would reduce rates of domestic violence, child neglect, costs to the criminal justice system and – perhaps most significantly at the moment – would hugely benefit the NHS.”

ENDS.

For information and interviews please contact Maddy Lawson, Head of Communications at Alcohol Change UK: maddy.lawson@alcoholchange.org.uk / 07848473732.

Notes to editors

Research

Total sample size was 530 adults in Wales, of whom 437 were regular drinkers before the lockdown began and 47 previous drinkers. The UK-wide numbers are drawn from a representative survey of 2,010 adults. The survey was carried out online by Opinium, between 7 and 9 April 2020, two weeks after the UK government introduced social distancing measures to tackle the COVID-19 crisis (23 March 2020). Figures relating to UK population are calculated using ONS mid-year population estimates for 2017 (ONS, Population Estimates for UK: mid-2017, table MYE2); an estimated UK population of 52,078,525 adults aged 18 and over. Figures relating to the Wales population are calculated using [ONS mid-year population estimates for 2018](#); an estimated Wales population of 2.5 million adults aged 18 and over. ONS provides figures for aged 16 and over.

Website figures

Alcohol Change UK have developed a hub where people can get information and advice about managing their drinking during lockdown, as well as links to where people can find support and treatment remotely. [Visit the coronavirus and alcohol hub.](#)

Number of visits to the 'Get help now' section of the website 23 March - 13 April:
10,499 vs 2,309

Number of visits to all coronavirus pages in this period:
11,262 (this is higher than the number of people visiting the 'Get help now' section because it includes 3,133 people who visited the [coronavirus alcohol and mental health tips](#), which sits in the blog).

The charity's website overall has seen only an 18% increase in traffic over the same period compared to last year. The biggest source of traffic is organic searches (i.e. people using a search engine to look for terms related to coronavirus and drinking).

About Alcohol Change UK

Alcohol Change UK works for a world free from alcohol harm. We fund, commission and share research; work to ensure more and better support and treatment; encourage better policy and regulation; shift drinking cultures through our campaigns; and work to change drinking behaviours by providing advice and information. [Find out more.](#)