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New York Warns Alcohol Raises Cancer Risk

The city launches a monthlong campaign saying no amount of drinking is safe when it comes to cancer.

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New York City's health department has launched a monthlong campaign warning residents that alcohol use is linked to cancer, putting the nation's largest city at the center of a long-running debate over drinking, public health and the role of wine and beer in everyday life.

The campaign, which began this week and will run through May, uses subway ads, social media, radio spots, bars and other public venues to deliver a blunt message: there is no safe or recommended amount of alcohol when it comes to cancer risk. City officials say even one drink a day can raise the risk of at least seven types of cancer, including breast, colorectal, esophageal, liver, mouth, throat and voice box cancers.

The city's health department said the effort is meant to "reduce the risk of alcohol-related cancers among New Yorkers" by making the connection between drinking and disease more visible. In a statement posted on its website, the department said it wants residents to understand that alcohol is a known carcinogen and that drinking less can lower risk.

"New Yorkers deserve to know the truth about the cancer risk when they drink alcohol," Dr. Alister Martin, the city's health commissioner, said in announcing the campaign. "For some people our data may ruin the buzz, but in reality it is their buzz that can kill."

The campaign is part of HealthyNYC, Mayor Eric Adams's broader public health initiative aimed at extending life expectancy in the city. One of its goals is to cut cancer deaths by 20% by 2030. City officials say alcohol reduction is one piece of that effort.

The message has drawn attention because it goes beyond warnings about heavy drinking and targets alcohol consumption itself. That includes wine and beer, two drinks often associated with moderate use and social meals. Public health agencies have increasingly emphasized that alcohol carries risks even at low levels, while many researchers and parts of the wine world continue to argue that moderate drinking, especially with food and in a Mediterranean-style pattern, should not be treated the same as abuse.

Lynn Schulman, a New York City council member who chairs the Council's Health Committee, said residents have a right to clear information about health risks. She praised the health department for giving people "simple and evidence-based information" so they can make informed decisions.

Nathalia Fernandez, a state senator who chairs the Alcoholism & Substance Use Disorders Committee, said alcohol remains widely normalized despite its documented health effects. She said research links excessive drinking to at least seven types of cancer and argued that New York lacks enough resources to address the problem fully. Fernandez said she supports a new alcohol tax to help pay for prevention, education and recovery services.

The campaign arrives as cities and governments around the world continue to revisit how they talk about alcohol. For years, public messaging has focused mainly on drunk driving, addiction and liver disease. New York’s new approach places cancer front and center and uses language designed to change behavior rather than simply warn against abuse.

That shift is likely to intensify debate among doctors, public health advocates, beverage producers and consumers over whether any level of drinking can be considered safe. In New York, city officials are betting that sharper warnings will persuade some residents to cut back.