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U.S. Study Finds One Daily Drink Raises Health Risks

Researchers say no amount of alcohol protects against mortality, though federal dietary guidelines stopped short of setting a one-drink limit.

Thursday, June 11, 2026



A government-commissioned study on alcohol and health was released Tuesday outside the federal dietary guidelines process, after the Trump administration chose not to feature its findings in the new U.S. nutrition advice, according to researchers involved in the work and federal officials who dispute that account.

The study, published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, was commissioned during the Biden administration as part of a broader review of alcohol-related harms. Its authors said the evidence showed health risks rise with as little as one drink a day and that no level of alcohol offers a protective effect on mortality. They also said even drinking levels often described as moderate increase the risk of premature death and more than 200 diseases, including heart disease and cancer.

The findings arrived after the federal government issued its 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans earlier this year. Those guidelines advise Americans to drink less alcohol for better overall health, but they do not include the more specific recommendation backed by the newly published study: that adults who drink should limit themselves to one drink or fewer a day.

The dispute has opened a new front in a long-running fight over how strongly the federal government should warn Americans about alcohol use, and how much weight policymakers should give to research that could affect consumer behavior across wine, beer and spirits. If public health messaging continues to move toward the idea that less alcohol is better at any level of intake, that could eventually shape demand patterns and marketing claims across the beverage business.

Robert Vincent, a former alcohol policy official at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration who helped lead the effort, accused the Trump administration of pushing the research aside. In an editorial published with the study, Vincent wrote that the main obstacle in alcohol policy was no longer scientific uncertainty but whether evidence would be allowed to guide policy when it conflicts with commercial interests.

Vincent, who said he was laid off last year during a federal workforce reduction, told The Associated Press that while he served under Trump he was asked to kill the study but did not do so. The Department of Health and Human Services did not immediately respond to that specific claim.

The department rejected the broader accusation that the findings were ignored. Emily Hilliard, an HHS spokesperson, said HHS and the Agriculture Department reviewed the study along with the wider body of scientific evidence and followed the established

process for drafting the dietary guidelines. She said the guidelines were based on the total scientific record, not on any single report or analysis.

The study was one of two government-backed reviews intended to inform federal guidance on alcohol. The other review reached a different conclusion on one key point, finding that moderate alcohol use was associated with lower all-cause mortality while also increasing the risk of some diseases. Authors of the newly released paper said their approach differed because they focused on deaths specifically attributable to alcohol rather than all-cause mortality, which they argued reduced confounding from factors such as income, education and access to health care.

Dr. Timothy Naimi, one of the study's authors and director of the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria, said he agreed with the government's general message that drinking less is better. But he said consumers need clearer quantity guidance if federal recommendations are meant to be practical.

"I'm glad that they had a message that corresponds with our science, and that is that less is best," Naimi told AP. "But giving people quantity information is necessary to make a truly informative guideline."

Priscilla Martinez-Matyszczyk, another author of the study and deputy scientific director at the Public Health Institute's Alcohol Research Group, said her team's work was designed to isolate harms directly linked to alcohol use. She also challenged arguments made during discussion of the dietary guidelines that drinking can have indirect health value because it helps people socialize.

In explaining the new guidelines earlier this year, Dr. Mehmet Oz, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said alcohol can act as "a social lubricant that brings people together" and suggested social connection itself has health benefits even if abstaining is preferable. Martinez-Matyszczyk said she was not aware of studies that clearly separate any social benefit from alcohol's direct health effects.

The release also renewed criticism from industry groups and congressional Republicans who had already challenged an earlier draft of the report. After researchers circulated draft findings last year, alcohol industry groups mounted campaigns against it. The

House oversight committee later issued a report calling the study biased and accusing its authors of reaching predetermined conclusions based on prior work and affiliations.

Amanda Berger, senior vice president for science and research at the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, told AP in an email that the congressional committee's findings showed the study was "irretrievably flawed."

Vincent rejected those criticisms and said researchers had been carefully screened for conflicts of interest. He argued that the final paper reflected sound science developed over several years. HHS noted that SAMHSA was not involved in reviewing or clearing Tuesday's published version, which expanded on an earlier draft with additional authors, analysis and policy recommendations.

The debate comes at a time of broader tension between parts of the scientific community and the Trump administration over how research is used in policymaking. That conflict has extended beyond alcohol policy into staffing decisions, grant cuts and disputes over federal agencies' treatment of established scientific findings.

For producers and sellers of alcoholic beverages, federal language matters because dietary guidance often shapes public understanding far beyond formal regulation. A shift from broad moderation advice to more explicit warnings tied to one daily drink could influence labeling debates, retailer messaging and how wineries, brewers and distillers talk about responsible consumption.

The study's conclusions are consistent with several recent reviews that have questioned older beliefs about possible cardiovascular benefits from moderate drinking. Researchers once thought modest alcohol intake might protect heart health, especially through observational studies comparing drinkers with nondrinkers. But newer analyses have found those apparent benefits often weaken or disappear after adjusting for differences in wealth, education and medical access.

Naimi pointed to a 2019 Lancet study that found moderate drinking slightly increased risks such as stroke and high blood pressure while showing no overall protective health effect. He said newer evidence increasingly supports a simple message: less alcohol is better for health.

According to researchers cited in the report, about half of Americans age 12 or older had consumed alcohol in the previous month, making it the most commonly used addictive substance in the country. In standard serving terms, one drink equals roughly a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine or one shot of liquor.

That definition matters because much of the current policy argument turns not on whether heavy drinking is harmful, which is widely accepted, but on whether low-level daily drinking should still be framed as relatively safe within public guidance. The newly published paper argues it should not be treated that way. Federal officials say they considered its findings but chose broader wording in national advice after weighing all available evidence.