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# Wales Raises Its Minimum Alcohol Price to 65p a Unit

Officials said the higher floor targets cheap high-strength drinks, with estimates projecting more than 900 fewer deaths over 20 years.

Thursday, October 1, 2026



Wales raised the minimum price of a unit of alcohol to 65p on Thursday, up from 50p, in a public health move the Welsh government said is intended to reduce heavy drinking and prevent alcohol-related illness and deaths.

The new rate took effect on October 1 across the country and brings Wales into line with Scotland, which already uses the same minimum unit price. The policy, known as minimum unit pricing, sets a legal floor for alcohol sales based on the amount of pure alcohol in a drink, making the cheapest high-strength products more expensive while leaving many other drinks unchanged.

Welsh officials said the change is expected to save hundreds of lives over time. Citing expert estimates, the government said the higher price floor could prevent more than 900 alcohol-related deaths and help nearly 5,000 people reduce harmful drinking in Wales over the next 20 years.

The government said the increase followed independent evaluations and a later consultation that found the original 50p level had lost much of its impact because of inflation. According to the evidence cited by ministers, the 50p rate had fallen in real terms to 39p in 2020 prices, weakening the effect of the measure since it was introduced.

Deputy Minister for Public and Preventative Health Nerys Evans said the increase was aimed at keeping the policy effective rather than penalizing moderate drinkers. She said evidence since the start of minimum pricing showed it had made an important contribution to reducing the health risks linked to excessive alcohol consumption, but inflation had reduced the power of the original threshold.

The government said shops, Trading Standards officers and support services received updated guidance before the rule change took effect. Retailers that sell alcohol in Wales now have to apply the new 65p floor when pricing products covered by the law.

The main impact is expected to fall on strong, low-cost drinks sold through stores rather than on drinks sold in bars and restaurants. Andrew Misell, director for Wales at the charity Alcohol Change UK, said the higher minimum price would keep large bottles of super-strength cider off shelves and make it harder for supermarkets to use bulk

promotions that lower the effective price as customers buy more. He said it would not raise the price of a pint in pubs.

That distinction matters for the drinks industry as retailers adjust prices on the products most exposed to the rule, especially low-cost cider, some wines and some spirits. The policy is likely to have little effect on many premium products already sold above the threshold, but it could change pricing and promotional strategies in the retail market and may shift some demand within the broader British drinks sector as sellers respond to the higher floor in Wales.

Minimum unit pricing is one part of a wider Welsh government effort to address alcohol harm and health inequality. Officials said the government invests more than £68 million to support people affected by alcohol and drug use, including more than £41 million that goes directly to local support services across Wales.

The change follows a review process that included independent evaluations published in January 2025, an operation and effect report in June 2025 and a subsequent consultation on whether to continue the policy and raise the rate. The Welsh government said that evidence supported both keeping the measure in place and increasing the price to restore its real value.

Minimum pricing has long been defended by public health advocates as a targeted way to reduce harm among hazardous and harmful drinkers, who are more likely to buy very cheap, high-strength alcohol. Supporters say the policy focuses on the products most associated with hospital admissions and deaths, rather than imposing a broad rise across all alcohol sales.

For stores and drinks suppliers, the immediate issue is compliance with the new threshold and the effect it may have on product ranges and promotions in Wales. Supermarkets and other retailers that rely on low-price sales in categories such as cider, wine and spirits may need to rework offers that had remained viable under the 50p floor, while businesses operating across the U.K. will now be managing the same minimum unit price in both Wales and Scotland.