vinetur

# What happens if you open a beer that expired ten years ago

The date on the label, the condition of the container, the carbonation and any changes in aroma can help you understand what is in front of you, but they do not certify that it is safe.

Thursday, November 19, 2026



If its storage history is unknown, the prudent choice is not to drink a beer found ten years after the date shown on its label. Educational illustration generated with AI.

Opening a beer whose printed date passed ten years ago is not the same as knowing whether it is safe to drink. It may still have some carbonation and show clear changes in aroma and flavour, but neither the time that has passed nor what you see when you open it can certify its safety, and a damaged or suspicious container should not be opened.

## The short answer: opening it does not mean you should drink it

If a beer has stayed sealed for ten years beyond the date printed on the label, several things may happen when you open it: it may sound normal, have very little fizz or produce quite a lot of foam. It is also reasonable to expect changes in quality, especially a loss of freshness. The important point is to separate two different questions: what may happen when you open it, and whether that gives you permission to drink it. The date alone cannot reliably predict either one.

That caution starts before you use a bottle opener or pull the ring tab. If the container shows leaks, punctures, cracks, heavy corrosion or unusual bulging or distortion, it should not be consumed. And if it also suggests excess internal pressure, it is best not to open it or puncture it just to see what happens.

## First, check which date you are actually reading

In everyday language people say a beer is expired, but not every printed date means the same thing. Under Codex Alimentarius concepts, a label may show a manufacturing or packaging date, a date linked to keeping its quality, such as a best-before date, or a use-by or expiry date tied to safety and quality. So before you interpret those ten years, read the words that go with the date, not just the number.

This matters because a beer that was packaged a long time ago is not necessarily a beer that has gone past a consumption date, and it should not be assumed that beers around the world all use the same labelling system. Codex is useful here as a reference for understanding the concepts, not as a single rule applied identically in every country.

| On the label | Usually points to | What you should not assume |
|---|---|---|
| Manufacturing or packaging date | When it was made or when the container was sealed | That this alone proves whether it is safe or unsafe today |

| On the label | Usually points to | What you should not assume |
|---|---|---|
| Best-before date | The period during which it is expected to keep its quality best | That it means the same as an expiry date in every country |
| Use-by or expiry date | An indication linked to safety and quality depending on the product | That every beer in the world necessarily carries this date |

## What may happen when you open it: sound, carbonation and foam

Carbonation is the carbon dioxide dissolved in beer. While the container stays closed, that gas remains under pressure; when you open it, the pressure drops and the carbon dioxide can escape as bubbles and foam. That is why you may hear the usual crack or hiss and see more or less foam when you pour it.

What you cannot do is use that moment as a reliable home test. How much gas comes out does not depend only on age: temperature and movement of the liquid also matter. A quiet opening does not prove contamination, and a lot of foam does not by itself prove that the contents are unsafe.

## What may have changed while it was still sealed

Beer does not start ageing only after it is opened. Changes can happen during storage even with the container sealed, and they depend on the recipe, the type of closure and how the beer was kept. Among the most important factors are oxygen, heat and light. Put simply, oxidation is a set of chemical reactions involving oxygen that can gradually dull the beer’s original freshness.

For an everyday beer designed to be drunk fresh, it is reasonable to expect a major loss of that freshness over time. Studies on beer storage describe weaker fruity or hoppy notes, aromas reminiscent of paper or cardboard, and changes in bitterness, which may feel harsher or linger longer. These are documented possibilities, not a mandatory description of every forgotten bottle.

There is an exception, but it should not be overstated. Some recipes can evolve in a deliberate way during cellaring, much as other products are intentionally allowed to change over time. That does not turn a beer found at the back of a cupboard into a properly aged bottle: controlled ageing is not the same as unknown storage.

**Quality and safety are not the same question**

**What may change in quality**

Less freshness and weaker fruity or hoppy notes

Paper or cardboard notes may appear and the perception of bitterness may change

**What that does not confirm**

Smell, colour and foam do not certify safety

Storage conditions and the integrity of the container still matter

## Bad flavour and a health risk are not the same thing

A beer that has lost quality does not automatically mean food poisoning. Traditional beer usually has several barriers that make it harder for many microorganisms to grow: some acidity, the presence of alcohol, hop compounds, low oxygen and certain brewing processes. Safety means that a product is safe to consume. The problem is that these barriers explain a general tendency; they do not certify the safety of one specific container when no one knows how it was stored.

Not all beers offer the same context, either. Research on low- and no-alcohol beers shows that when barriers such as alcohol, acidity or storage conditions change, some microorganisms may survive or grow more easily. That does not make those beers the centre of the issue, but it does mean simplistic claims such as alcohol always protects against any risk should be avoided.

It is also unwise to treat home observation as proof of safety. An unpleasant smell, a clearly abnormal appearance or a damaged container are good reasons to reject the product. But a seemingly normal smell, proper-looking foam or a usual colour do not rule out microbiological hazards. For that reason, taking a sip to check it is not a good guideline.

## What to do with a beer found ten years later

If a beer turns up ten years after the date shown and you cannot verify how it was stored, the prudent decision is not to drink it. That recommendation does not mean there is a proven toxicity threshold exactly at ten years. It means that without reliable information about temperature, light exposure, knocks, the seal and the integrity of the container, neither its quality nor its safety can be assured.

The integrity of the container deserves one last visual check. Leaks, punctures, cracks, heavy corrosion and unusual bulging or distortion are reasons to discard it. It is also worth remembering that uncontrolled refermentation can create extra carbon dioxide and damage bottles or cans; this does not always happen just because a beer is old, but it is a real enough possibility to justify not handling a suspicious container.

Put in the most useful way for someone who finds one at home: opening it may bring a surprise burst of gas, very little foam or aromas that have changed a lot, but that still does not answer the important question. When storage is unknown, age is not enough to declare the contents poisonous, but it is not enough to call them safe either. Between curiosity and caution, caution is the better choice.

### If you find a beer like this

- Read what kind of date appears on the label before you interpret it
- Do not open or drink a container with leaks, cracks, heavy corrosion or unusual distortion
- If you cannot verify how it was stored over the years, do not drink it
- Remember that a normal opening or a normal smell does not certify safety