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German Official Seeks Zero Alcohol Limit for Drivers

The proposal would also raise the drinking age to 18, ending a rule that lets some minors drink beer or wine with parents.

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A senior health official in the German state of Lower Saxony is pushing for a stricter alcohol policy that would ban any measurable alcohol behind the wheel and raise the legal drinking age to 18, ending a long-standing rule that allows minors as young as 14 to drink beer or wine in public when accompanied by a parent or guardian.

The proposal comes from the state’s health minister, who said the changes are meant to improve road safety and reduce alcohol-related crashes. Under current rules in Germany, drivers can legally have small amounts of alcohol in their system, depending

on the circumstances and their driving record. The minister wants that limit reduced to 0.0‰ for all drivers, a move that would place alcohol use and driving under a complete ban.

He also wants to close what critics have long called a gap in youth alcohol policy by setting 18 as the minimum age for buying and consuming alcohol. At present, German law allows 14- and 15-year-olds to drink beer, wine and cider in public if they are with a parent or legal guardian. Spirits remain restricted to adults. The minister said ending that exception would better protect young people and encourage more responsible drinking habits.

The proposal is expected to be discussed in the legislature soon. It reflects a broader debate in Germany over how far the state should go in limiting alcohol access, especially for teenagers and young adults, at a time when public health officials continue to warn about drinking-related harm on roads and in daily life.

The push also has implications beyond traffic safety. Any move to tighten youth access could affect sales of beer, wine and spirits in retail stores, restaurants and event venues, where younger consumers often enter the market through family settings before they reach adulthood.