

Alcohol

Quick facts



87% of Australians drink alcohol²



30% drink at a long and short-term risk levels²



1 in 5 workers drink at short-term risk levels weekly²



1 in 6 workers drink at short-term risk levels monthly²



1 in 5 workers drink at long-term risk levels²

Alcohol and work can both have significant roles in our life:

- work colleagues often gather at the end of a long and/or stressful working day or week to share a couple of drinks and chat about their lives, families, and work
- workplaces arrange formal social events throughout the year to show appreciation to workers and facilitate team building
- some workplaces celebrate milestones with a 'slab of beer'.

Workplace culture and environments can shape workers' drinking habits. Sometimes, this influence may be harmful to individual workers and the broader working environment.

Work-related drinking may negatively impact individual and work health, safety, wellbeing, and productivity. Some populations and industries are at increased risk of alcohol-related harm.

Australia's alcohol guidelines

Risky alcohol use is very common among Australian workers.

Australian guidelines recommend:

- To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy adults should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.

Pregnant women and young people aged under 18 are recommended to not consume alcohol at all.

See the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol](#) for more information.



Risky alcohol use:

- directly and indirectly impacts workplace health, safety, wellbeing, and productivity
- is involved in over 10% of workplace accidents⁶
- costs Australian businesses an estimated \$8bn per year in lost productivity due to alcohol use⁴ and absenteeism.⁷

Even low levels of alcohol consumption may increase workplace risk and reduce productivity if workers drink in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or under the wrong circumstances.

At-risk workers and industries

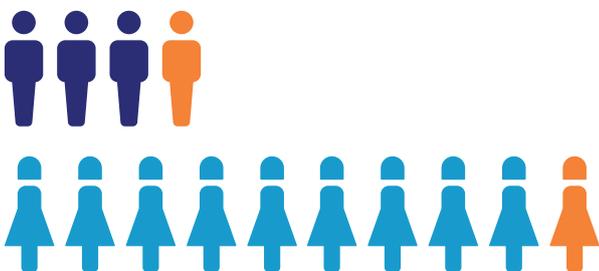
Risky drinking is more common among some workers in some industries. Some workers are also more likely to experience workplace injuries than others. For example, young Australians aged under 29 years are:

1. most likely to engage in short-term risky drinking²
2. a high risk group for sustaining workplace injuries.²

Males are also more likely than females to drink alcohol at risky levels.

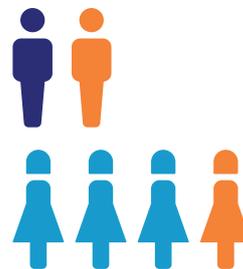
Long-term risky drinking

1 in 4 males (28%) and 1 in 10 (11%) females drink at long-term risk levels.²



Short-term risky drinking

1 in 2 males (42%) and 1 in 4 females (23%) drink at short-term risk levels monthly or weekly.²



10%
WORKPLACE
ACCIDENTS⁶

\$8bn^{4,7}

Workplace factors that influence workers' alcohol consumption include:

Working conditions | Age and gender | Availability of alcohol | Workplace culture



Responding to alcohol risk factors

Employers cannot reduce all workplace risk factors that contribute to workers' alcohol use.

However, they can encourage workers to drink alcohol responsibly and reduce the likelihood of workers attending work impaired by alcohol by:

- assessing the workplace social, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to risky drinking (see [Fact Sheet: Assessing Workplace Alcohol and Drug Risk](#))
- developing a comprehensive Alcohol and Drug Policy to address your workplace risk factors (see [Topic 2: Workplace Alcohol and Drug Policies](#))
- promoting social and team-building events which support responsible drinking or non-drinking practices
- conducting regular worker awareness sessions and/or toolbox talks about alcohol use
- encouraging workers with alcohol problems to seek help from treatment services (see [Fact Sheet: Having Helpful Conversations](#)).

Incident management

Workers can be affected by alcohol if they are intoxicated or hungover. Workers affected by alcohol may be a risk to themselves and others.

The effects of alcohol can last several hours, and may be detected in a person's bloodstream several hours after the last drink, and even the following day.

However, it can be difficult to know if a worker is affected by alcohol or experiencing a health condition.

Do not assume that workers are affected by alcohol simply because they show certain indicators or behaviours.

1 in 3



Over 1 in 3 workers employed in construction, and utilities drink weekly at short-term risky levels.²

1 in 4



Over 1 in 4 workers employed in hospitality, arts & recreation, utilities, and mining drink at risky short-term levels on a monthly basis.²

Indicators of alcohol use

Slurred speech

Hazy thinking

Delayed reactions

Concentration loss

Dulled hearing

Blurred vision

Loss of coordination and balance.



The short-term risks associated with alcohol consumption include:

- impaired judgement of speed and distance
- slowed reaction times and responses
- loss of coordination, vision, and hearing
- heightened sense of confidence about ability to perform tasks
- decreased ability to operate machinery, drive and make decisions
- aggressive or inappropriate behaviour
- diminished sense of safety amongst co-workers and workplace morale.

If you believe a worker is experiencing problems with alcohol, approach them from a safety first perspective.

Attending work under the influence of even small amounts alcohol increases the likelihood of accidents and injuries, co-worker and/or customer conflict, and fatalities.

If you think a worker is experiencing problems with alcohol, approach them for a confidential conversation.

See the [Fact Sheet: Having Helpful Conversations](#) for more guidance about supporting workers struggling with their alcohol and drug use and/or mental health.

Intoxicated workers need immediate removal from the work environment.

For more information about responding appropriately and safely to critical incidents, see:

- [Fact Sheet: Critical Alcohol and Drug Situations](#)
- [10 Principles for Responding to Intoxicated Workers](#).

References are available at <http://worklife.tmp-s.com/alcohol-and-drug-risk/alcohol/references>.