

UN health agency sounds alarm on alcohol abuse

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(AP) -- Alcohol abuse is killing 2.5 million people each year and governments must do more to prevent it, the World Health Organization said Friday.

Some 4 percent of all deaths worldwide are attributable to alcohol, the U.N. body said. The main causes of alcohol-related deaths are injuries incurred when drunk, cancer, [liver cirrhosis](#), [heart disease](#) and strokes.

"It's a killer and it's not good from a public health point of view," Melvin Freeman of South African's Ministry of Health and a contributor to the report, told reporters in Geneva.

Worldwide, over 6 percent of male deaths are related to alcohol, but only just over 1 percent of deaths in women. Almost one in 10 deaths among young people aged 15-to-29 is from alcohol-related causes - about 320,000 each year - WHO said.

The global body's first report on the subject in seven years recommended that governments raise alcohol taxes, restrict sales, promote alcoholism prevention and treatment programs, and ban some alcohol advertising.

WHO declined to provide a specific recommendation on the acceptable limit of [alcohol consumption](#), saying setting such a level was up to member states.

Shekhar Saxena, the director of WHO's mental health and substance abuse department, said the effects of alcohol use also differ in ethnic groups. Populations in Asia, for example, are more susceptible to throat cancer from [alcohol abuse](#).

But he added "in WHO's perspective, no drinking is entirely safe."

More information: WHO report: <http://bit.ly/eNzZep>

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