

Binge-drink Britain unveils minimum booze price plan

November 28 2012

The British government was to announce plans on Wednesday for a minimum alcohol price of £0.45 (\$0.72, 0.56 euros) in England and Wales in an attempt to restrain an infamous binge-drinking culture.

The interior ministry was unveiling a consultation on the per-unit price, having announced in March that it would introduce minimum pricing to curb the "scourge of violence" caused by drunken revellers in town centres.

In Scotland, a minimum price of £0.50 per unit is due to come into force next April.

One unit in Britain is 10 millilitres of pure alcohol. A double pub measure of spirits, a pint of low-strength beer and a medium [glass of wine](#) each contain around two units.

"Those who enjoy a quiet drink or two have nothing to fear from our proposals," an interior ministry official said.

The consultation will last 10 weeks.

Minimum pricing is designed to prevent supermarkets and [convenience stores](#) selling heavily discounted drinks, which are blamed by the government for much of the rowdy behaviour seen on British streets at the weekends.

The drinks most affected would be cheap, super-strength ciders and lagers.

Multi-buy deals could also be banned under the plans.

The minimum price is not expected to affect the cost of drinks in pubs.

[Excessive alcohol consumption](#) costs Britain's [National Health Service](#) (NHS) around £2.7 billion a year, the government says, while the interior ministry estimates wider societal costs of around £21 billion a year.

Prime Minister David Cameron initially proposed a [minimum price](#) of £0.40 for England and Wales, but was under pressure to follow Scotland's lead and raise the threshold.

But the drinks industry protests that minimum pricing will punish low-earners without addressing the underlying problems.

"Where's the evidence that imposing a blanket measure that puts up prices for all customers will make a difference?" said Andrew Opie of the British Retail Consortium.

"Most people already drink less than recommended limits. There is no reason why they should be denied access to discounts."

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Citation: Binge-drink Britain unveils minimum booze price plan (2012, November 28) retrieved 17 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-11-binge-drink-britain-unveils-minimum-booze.html>

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