ALCOHOL AND COVID-19

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Each year, alcohol consumption contributes to 3 million deaths globally, and 390,000 deaths in the Americas. In the Americas, alcohol is responsible for 18.9 million Disability Adjusted Life Years.

Alcohol weakens the immune system, making consumers more susceptible to getting COVID-19.

Alcohol risks and harms are interconnected. Alcohol is a risk factor for COVID-19 and NCDs and NCDs increase the risk of dying from COVID-19.

ALCOHOL USE DURING THE PANDEMIC IN THE NON-LATIN CARIBBEAN

A PAHO survey revealed that among English speaking Caribbean survey respondents, between 2019 and June, 2020:

1. Prevalence of alcohol use decreased from 67% to 56%.
2. Monthly consumption of informal or illicit alcohol increased from 2.2% to 4.9%.
3. Heavy episodic drinking among youth ages 18–29 increased from 29.5% to 36.2%.

In past public health and economic crises, alcohol consumption patterns have been seen to decrease initially due to restrictions on alcohol access, but increase in the long-term due to prolonged uncertainty and distress.

ALCOHOL, COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

Alcohol is sometimes used to deal with difficult emotions. 52.8% of PAHO survey English speaking Caribbean respondents reported at least one feeling of nervousness, anxiety, trouble sleeping and relaxing, irritability, restlessness, fear and uncertainty during the pandemic.

A UNICEF survey found that 46% of female and 31% of male Latin-American and Caribbean youth were pessimistic about the future.

THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY

Alcohol is heavily marketed in the Caribbean and regional alcohol companies have used the current pandemic to promote their brands through corporate social responsibility campaigns.

'Regional distilleries join the fight against COVID-19'

'Distillery donates 55 laptops to secondary schools'

Such marketing may promote alcohol use in the long run.

HEAVY ALCOHOL MARKETING COUPLED WITH THE COVID-19 CRISIS CAUSING POOR MENTAL HEALTH IS LIKELY TO LEAD TO AN INCREASE IN ALCOHOL USE AND MISUSE IN THE CARIBBEAN REGION