

Public Health Experts Urge The Governor To Roll Back Alcohol-Focused Executive Orders

Written by Melissa Rosales

A group of local public health experts and advocates are joining the American Public Health Association to urge governors to roll back alcohol-focused executive orders established during the pandemic. Governor Ricketts issued emergency measures allowing curbside pickup, delivery, drive through and drinks to go since March.

Binge drinking has increased by 26% during the pandemic according to RTI International. Project Extra Mile in Omaha and Monument Prevention Coalition in Scotts Bluff are now urging policy makers to strengthen science-based policies to prevent alcohol-related harms. Project Extra Mile Executive Director Chris Wagner said science shows increasing alcohol availability increases harm too.

"Obviously, policymakers had to think out of the box when kind of COVID struck," Wagner said. "But, I think the public health has really been ignored in that part of the equation and those decisions."

Nebraska ranks as the 5th worst state when it comes to binge drinking and 2nd worst in self-reported driving under the influence, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The World Health Organization actually recommends countries restrict access to alcohol because it weakens the immune system and makes people more susceptible to the coronavirus. Wagner said he's concerned the relaxed standards for the sale of alcohol in Nebraska will become permanent after the pandemic is over.

"This is only going to get worse," Wagner said. "We will have more people losing their life due to alcohol if these executive orders are allowed to become permanent in our state."

Wagner and other coalitions want Governor Ricketts to roll back the relaxed rules for alcohol sales when Phase 4 is reached, since most restaurants will be able to operate normally.