



The Extra Mile

Advocating for evidence-based policies and practices to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms

Is Going Out to Eat and Drink Worth the Risk?

Research shows heightened COVID-19 threat tied to indoor dining and drinking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published a study of adults experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and their activities two weeks before diagnosis. In this investigation, participants with and without COVID-19 reported similar community exposures, except for going to locations with on-site eating and drinking options. [The researchers concluded participants who tested positive were twice as likely to have reported dining at a restaurant than those testing negative for the virus.](#) Dining at restaurants was the only activity where researchers saw a significant difference in outcomes. Restaurants are not the only culprits though, as Dr. Anthony Fauci recently cautioned that [when bars open, infections tend to follow.](#)



The Washington Post shared an analysis of the relationship between cell phone location data and COVID-19 cases. The article concluded that [states reopening bars saw a doubling in COVID-19 cases three weeks later.](#) Another analysis by JP Morgan using Johns Hopkins University data showed a [correlation between consumer spending at restaurants and new COVID-19 cases](#) reported three weeks later. Since the beginning of the pandemic, citizens worldwide have been encouraged to stay home and social distance. As many states reopen, lack of adherence to these guidelines has become even more apparent.

The Railyard in Lincoln, NE was pictured hosting [a large crowd with limited mask use and social distancing measures](#). Decreased adherence to Nebraska's guidelines occurred as the pandemic wore on over the last six months, but what is the cost to the broader community? As regulations are lifted, and Nebraska enters Phase 4 of the state's Directed Health Measures (DHMs), community spread continues to be a problem in counties across the state. Returning to 'life as usual' will continue to fuel the spread of COVID-19.

Several accounts of parties, gatherings, and subsequent quarantine were reported nationwide as colleges and universities returned to fall classes. The University of Nebraska – Lincoln is no exception. Eight sororities and a fraternity were [under quarantine due to COVID-19](#) soon after the semester began, followed by six sororities and fraternities placed on [immediate suspension due to large gatherings](#) in violation of COVID-19 guidelines.

When Governor Pete Ricketts was recently [asked about closing the bars](#) in response to more cases, he indicated this would not be considered if hospitalization rates remain stable. With Husker football season right around the corner, there are some efforts among businesses to decrease indoor capacity and adhere to mask mandates in both Lincoln and Omaha. However, mask use and social distancing are challenging to maintain in a restaurant/bar environment given the inability of eating and drinking with a mask on. In addition, it is widely known that increased alcohol consumption leads to decreased inhibitions, and that would include following recommended guidelines about masks and social distancing.

As winter approaches and outdoor seating becomes less utilized at liquor licenses, additional information about indoor, airborne transmission is increasingly of concern. According to *The New York Times*, 239 scientists in 32 countries [have outlined evidence showing that smaller particles can infect people](#) with COVID-19, and they sent a letter [calling on the WHO to revise its recommendations](#). They stated, "We are concerned that the lack of recognition of the risk of airborne transmission of COVID-19 and the lack of clear recommendations on the control measures against the airborne virus will have significant consequences: people may think that they are fully protected by adhering to the current recommendations, but in fact, additional airborne interventions are needed for further reduction of infection risk."

Between now and October 31, Nebraska counties are in Phase 4 of reopening as outlined in the state's DHMs. The move to Phase 4 applies to every health department jurisdiction in the state with the exception of Lancaster County, which continues to keep some Phase 3 restrictions in place according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Bars and restaurants are encouraged to adhere to [guidelines](#) only, and these establishments are no longer subject to DHM requirements.

Since restrictions on occupancy and other factors impacting business have been removed, maintaining the exemptions in the executive orders for to-go cocktails and curbside pickup of alcohol simply don't make sense and fail to acknowledge that our state faces significant alcohol-related harms. Similar [practices were recently discontinued in Alabama](#) as statewide restrictions on bars and restaurants were lifted.

[Legislative Resolution 450](#), an interim study to evaluate whether to make these exemptions permanent, was introduced in July in Nebraska; however, a date

has not yet been set for the hearing.

These types of regulatory changes can increase alcohol availability and related harms, including impaired driving and the broader consequences and costs that follow. Alcohol's role in the spread of COVID-19 is just one factor to consider while weighing public health versus economic interests. Alcohol contributes to a wide range of community and [economic problems](#).

Law Enforcement Committed to Preventing Underage Drinking During Pandemic

Compliance checks find nearly 1 in 10 businesses checked sold alcohol to minors

During a series of compliance checks at off-sale alcohol retailers in Douglas and Sarpy Counties during July and September, 24 businesses were cited for selling alcohol to a minor. The checks resulted in 9 percent of 271 retail outlets being cited for selling alcohol to a minor.



Due to regulatory changes intended to aid alcohol retailers during the pandemic, it's easier than ever to access alcohol in Nebraska, creating more costs and harms in communities across the state. Law enforcement operations to prevent both retail and social access to alcohol by youth will continue.

"It has been reported that alcohol sales have increased during the pandemic. This time has been an excellent opportunity for us to confirm that businesses continue to prioritize the refusal of sales to minors," said Bellevue Police Department Lieutenant Andy Jashinske. "The safety of our children and communities is our number one priority."

According to recent survey data from RTI International, [adults are drinking more alcohol during the coronavirus pandemic](#). The results show that a person's average drinks per day have increased by 27 percent, while binge drinking frequency increased by 26 percent. Researchers believe this increase also applies to underage drinkers.

Four businesses cited face enhanced penalties due to prior sale to minor violations within the last four years, the time frame used by the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) to assess penalties. If found guilty, they will face mandatory days of closure (no alcohol sales allowed) and days of suspension that can be paid off as a fine at \$100 per day according to the [LCC's penalty guidelines](#). Those businesses include:

- **Aldi 43, 4801 N 30th St**, Omaha (3/19);
- **La Economica, 5520 S 36th St**, Omaha (3/19, 12/14);
- **Mega Saver, 7204 Blondo St**, Omaha (5/18);
- **Mega Saver, 1357 NW Radial Hwy**, Omaha (7/18).

The other 20 businesses are facing their first sale to a minor violation within the last four years. If found guilty by the LCC, these businesses could be facing 10-20 days of suspension that they could choose to pay off as a fine at \$50 per

day instead of suspension.

The full list of retailers checked can be found by [clicking here](#).

Women More Susceptible to Alcoholic Liver Disease

The gap in premature alcohol-related deaths between men and women is narrowing

A new [study](#) found that premature deaths due to alcoholic liver disease are increasing among women. Women died of alcoholic liver disease on average about 2–3 years earlier than men, despite often having longer life expectancies. Additionally, white non-Hispanics increasingly experienced more significant alcoholic liver disease deaths than black non-Hispanics and Hispanics.



[“Previously large gaps between women and men in alcohol-related harms, including mortality, are narrowing,”](#) said Aaron M. White, Ph.D., study author and senior scientific advisor to the director at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). The study authors noted that alcoholic liver disease is a significant problem in the U.S. and substantially contributes to premature deaths. The condition is associated with greater premature death rates than all other causes.

For example, in 2018, the percentage of premature deaths from all causes was 33%, which was substantially lower than 87% of premature deaths attributed to alcoholic liver disease. The study authors concluded that prevention and intervention efforts are crucial to address the narrowing gap between men and women and the widening racial disparities in premature deaths due to alcoholic liver disease.

Last year, NIAAA sounded the alarm on the [significant role alcohol plays in deaths of despair](#) in the U.S., leading to overdoses, suicides, and liver disease, as well as to a wide range of other conditions. Researchers noted that deaths from liver disease are key contributors to the increase in deaths of despair. The number of U.S. deaths each year from liver diseases reached 41,743 in 2017. About half of these deaths were caused by alcoholic liver disease, notably cirrhosis.

Around the Globe

New Report: Signalling Virtue, Promoting Harm

[Signalling Virtue, Promoting Harm: Unhealthy Commodity Industries and COVID-19](#), was released in September by the NCD Alliance and the SPECTRUM Consortium. The report provides an analysis of industry tactics to benefit



economically from the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors noted that unhealthy commodity industries have a long history of influencing public policy to “protect, expand and exploit their markets.” Specific efforts have focused on classifying unhealthy commodities as essential, seeking exemptions from public health regulations, mounting pressure to remove lockdown restrictions, and attempting to benefit from recovery strategies.

In the U.S., we've seen this play out in several ways, including [lobbying to permanently lower alcohol taxes](#). Curbside pickup, online sales, and home delivery have expanded dramatically. Many states in the U.S. have adopted [operational changes](#) and deemed liquor stores "essential businesses," placing them at the same level of importance as grocery stores and pharmacies in response to COVID-19.

In Nebraska, Governor Ricketts authorized licensed establishments to [sell beer, wine, and spirits to customers with takeout](#) or delivery orders. Restaurants and bars are allowed to sell alcohol via drive-through or curbside pickup without customers leaving their vehicles, which usually is not permitted under state law. A [second executive order](#) gave restaurants and bars the ability to provide [takeout for cocktails](#) and other alcoholic beverages as long as they have a sealed lid. While restaurants and bars have returned to normal operations under Phase 4 of the state's Directed Health Measures, these exemptions for retailers remain in place.

Public Health and Safety Policy Gains Support in Scotland

A new analysis by Public Health Scotland found 49.8% of the 1,022 people asked [supported Minimum Unit Pricing \(MUP\)](#) compared to 27.6% who did not, according to data analyzed from the 2013, 2015, and 2019 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey. “While there are a number of possible explanations for why attitudes have grown more favourable, one interpretation is that the public’s understanding of the policy and what it means for them has improved. A related possible explanation is that some concerns the public may have held prior to implementation have not been observed,” said Dr. Karl Ferguson, Public Health Intelligence Advisor at Public Health Scotland.

[MUP for alcohol was implemented in Scotland in May 2018](#) and refers to a price floor for alcoholic drinks, meaning that licensed premises cannot sell an alcoholic beverage for less than a specific price, determined by the alcohol-by-volume (ABV) percentage of the drink. Research has indicated that the introduction of [MUP appears to have been successful in reducing the amount of alcohol purchased by households](#) in Scotland.

Youth Leadership Council to Resume Meetings This Month

Partnership helps youth identify opportunities to make a big difference in their community

Project Extra Mile is excited to resume monthly Youth Leadership Council meetings on **Thursday, October 8, 2020, at 6:30 PM – 7:30 PM**. The meetings will take place via Zoom until further notice. 8th-12th grade students who are interested in participating in future meetings can register at the following meeting link: <https://zoom.us/j/97348927086>. For more information, please see the [flyer](#) on all upcoming meeting dates.

The group’s continued focus is to offer young people the opportunity to engage

in youth-led strategies aimed at influencing community conditions, standards, institutions, systems, and policies to change the context in which substance use occurs in order to reduce underage drinking.

Some examples of strategies the group has focused on in the past include:

- Meeting with local and state officials to discuss underage alcohol use;
- Making recommendations on alcohol and other drug policies at school;
- Collaborating with law enforcement and other community agencies;
- Developing awareness materials and public service announcements.

The Prevention Research Center has noted that [environmental prevention strategies focus on changing the environment in which a person consumes alcohol rather than the individual drinker's behavior](#). Further, these prevention efforts seek to change the physical, social, economic, and legal circumstances that enable access to alcohol, heavier drinking, and other alcohol-related harms to communities.

PEM has slated June 2021 for its next [Youth Leadership Retreat](#). Space is limited and registration information is available on www.projectextramile.org. For more information about the upcoming Youth Leadership Council meetings, please contact youth@projectextramile.org.

Coalition to Discuss Highway Safety Goals to Decrease Alcohol-Related Fatalities

Alcohol accounts for approximately 34% of all traffic fatalities in Nebraska

Mark your calendar to join Project Extra Mile's coalition meeting on **Wednesday, October 14, 2020, at 9 a.m.** Nebraska Highway Safety Office (HSO) Administrator Bill Kovarik will provide an overview of the state's FY 2021 Strategic Traffic Safety Plan and the upcoming 2022-2026 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.

Each state is required to develop and implement an SHSP under federal transportation law. Nebraska's current goal is to reduce traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) from 1.10 (2011-2015 average fatality rate) to 0.90 fatalities by December 31, 2021, which is expected to save 54 lives a year. To achieve this goal, the state must decrease alcohol-impaired fatalities by 18 each year.

Crash data from 2011-2015 revealed that progress on alcohol-related crashes has stalled in the last decade.

- Alcohol impairment accounted for approximately 34% of all traffic fatalities during the five years (2011-2015).
- Alcohol-Impaired fatalities increased from 51 in 2011 to 81 in 2015 (58.5%).



Omaha Metro Coalition Meeting
Wednesday, **October 14, 2020**
9:00 a.m.

Please join us **VIRTUALLY** for our coalition meeting being held via Zoom.

Bill Kovarik, Administrator
Nebraska Highway Safety Office
who will be sharing an overview of alcohol's role in



Nebraska's FY21 Highway Safety Plan

Thank you for your involvement!
Jennifer Pollock
Jennifer Pollock, Coalition Chair

Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://zoom.us/j/97721453735>
Meeting ID: 977 2145 3735
Password: 12345

For more information:
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- Alcohol-Impaired driving arrests dropped from 10,549 in 2011 to 7,136 in 2015 (32.4%).
- Sixty-two percent (62%) of drivers in alcohol-related fatal crashes were not wearing a seat belt.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, alcohol-impaired driving is a significant and persistent risk to Americans' health and safety, exceeding annual deaths due to certain cancers, HIV/AIDS, and drownings as well as contributing to long-term disabilities. The report, *Getting to Zero Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities*, offers [recommendations to address the problem](#) and identifies evidence-based policies, programs, and systems changes to achieve progress in reducing alcohol-impaired driving fatalities.

In addition to alcohol and other impaired drivers, Nebraska's SHSP focuses on the following priorities:

- Distracted drivers
- Young drivers (under 21)
- Seat belts and child restraints
- Intersection safety

The coalition continues to meet each month via Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/977721453735>. For more information and to receive the meeting invitation, please contact info@projectextramile.org. We hope you can join us for this important discussion!

