

HSE Press Release

Tuesday, 7th March 2017



Drink Less and Gain More

No matter how much you drink, find out how it affects your health and mental wellbeing at AskAboutAlcohol.ie, a new website from the HSE

The HSE will today, Tuesday 7th March 2017, launch a new website for the public on alcohol – about how much we’re drinking, how it affects us healthwise, and how we can gain more by drinking less.

Speaking at today’s launch, Dr Stephanie O’Keeffe, HSE National Director for Health & Wellbeing said, “This is the first HSE website that provides dedicated information about alcohol risk and offers support and guidance to anyone who wants to cut back on their drinking.

Comprehensive surveys show that harmful drinking patterns have become the norm for many people in Ireland, while awareness of the significant risk associated with these drinking patterns remains low. The HSE, in providing a wide range of health and related services, has insight into the impact of alcohol harm nationally. Whether it is through the well-known ED experience or right through inpatient and mental health services, our experts are well-placed to engage with the public to advise and support individuals in making clear and informed choices.”

askaboutalcohol.ie has been created to provide authoritative information source on alcohol risk to enable everyone to manage their own health better. It is also designed to work in tandem with public health legislation and planned regulatory changes on alcohol labelling, availability and pricing.

Launching the new website Minister Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy said, “I am delighted that we now have a high-quality and engaging source of evidence-based information on alcohol, provided by the HSE in partnership with our wider health community. Giving people information on the risks associated with alcohol is of huge value, yet if we want to see positive changes in our drinking habits then we have to make healthier choices about consumption. The measures in the Public Health Alcohol Bill will help create a supportive environment for making healthier choices when it comes to alcohol. Ultimately, together, we want to reduce the enormous burden of alcohol related harm on Irish families.”

Dr Marie Laffoy, Assistant National Director, HSE National Cancer Control Programme said, “Research shows that awareness with regards the link between alcohol and cancer is low. Drinking alcohol regularly increases the risk of 7 different cancers; mouth, pharyngeal (throat), oesophageal (gullet), laryngeal (voicebox), breast, bowel and liver. Alcohol is responsible for 1 in 8 breast cancers in Ireland and 900 people are diagnosed with alcohol-related cancers each year. Askaboutalcohol.ie is an independent reliable source of information regarding the link between alcohol and cancer.”

In addition to providing information on the physical and mental health effects of alcohol, askaboutalcohol.ie has useful tools to help you assess your drinking including a drinks

calculator. The website also provides information for people, who are worried about their own drinking, or worried about someone close to them, and has a service finder to help connect people to support and services.

Prof Donal O'Shea, Consultant Endocrinologist and Chair Royal College of Physicians of Ireland Policy Group on Obesity said: "Drinking within safe limits is important for lots of reasons, including maintaining a healthy weight. People often don't consider the amount of calories in alcohol as part of their look-back at their daily intake. They will consider a gin and tonic (160 kcals) to be the same as an Americano (4 kcals). A night out having two pints (190 kcals each) before dinner and two glasses of wine (120 kcals each) totals around 600 liquid kcals - before eating. Many people in Ireland have more than this and reach over 1,000 kcals in alcohol consumption, before they have any food. Before you know it, your total daily calorie allowance (1,600kcal to 2,000kcal) has been consumed in one sitting."

Dr Mark Murphy, Irish College of General Practitioners said, "Young men and women often present to their GP with a serious healthcare problem, caused by alcohol, unaware that their intake of alcohol was the reason for their complaint. Patients may present with mental health symptoms such as anxiety, low mood or poor sleep, which are directly related to excessive alcohol intake. Similarly many patients present to their GP with a physical complaint such as fatigue, a sexual health problems or trauma, relating to excessive consumption of alcohol, of which they may not be aware."

Dr Bobby Smyth said "I am delighted to see this website and campaign being launched, and delighted that we are adopting a clear position and language with which to talk about alcohol in Ireland. Alcohol causes cancer, alcohol hurts our mental health, alcohol harms many people in our society. Language like 'drink responsibly, moderation, sensibly' – we know from our research that these are meaningless and don't offer any true guidance. People want health advice from health experts, and we hope that this site and this campaign will offer just that."

The HSE's Ask About Alcohol communications campaign will feature supporting promotional materials, social media content, radio advertisements and a digital marketing campaign to take place across the coming months.

Ends.

Notes to Editors

HSE Alcohol Helpline 1800 459 459 – Monday to Friday 9.30pm to 5.30pm