

# Safer Drinking Tips During COVID-19



During the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic you may have difficulty accessing alcohol. Liquor stores may limit hours and/or numbers of people in the store, move to delivery only, and/or stop accepting cash.

## Making a plan for safer drinking in case of reduced alcohol availability

Safer drinking during COVID-19 can include planning to:

- planning to drink your regular amount, but spreading it out over time to reduce bingeing and withdrawal
- slowly reduce the amount you drink each day,
- drinking lower alcohol content drinks such as beer instead of wine or wine instead of spirits, or
- taking a break from drinking after slowly reducing.

## Before making a plan, know your risk of serious alcohol withdrawal

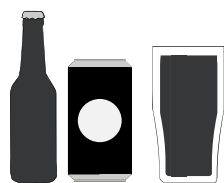
Everyone is different but for some people who drink very heavily, stopping all at once or cutting down too fast can be dangerous. To make a plan, ask yourself:

1. Do I drink more than one bottle of spirits per day, or equivalent? (about 3 bottles of wine or 15 bottles of beer?)
2. Have I ever had a seizure from alcohol withdrawal before?
3. Have I ever had hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't real) from alcohol withdrawal before?
4. Do I usually shake, sweat, and feel nauseous or vomit as soon as I wake up in the morning?

If you said “yes” to any of these questions, you are considered to be at **high risk** of withdrawal seizures.

If so, do not stop drinking suddenly unless you have been prescribed medication to relieve withdrawal. Cut down = gradually by no more than one or two drinks per day.

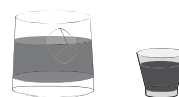
For these guidelines, “a drink” means...



BEER/CIDER/COOLER  
341mL (12oz)  
5% alcohol content



WINE  
142mL (5oz) glass  
12% alcohol content



DISTILLED ALCOHOL  
(rum, vodka, gin, etc)  
43mL (1.5oz) glass  
40% alcohol content

Alcohol strengths may vary from product to product so check the % of alcohol by volume listed on the container.

## Know the amount of alcohol you drink

You may have to switch your preferred type of alcohol based on what is available. To make sure you are not drinking too little or too much, you can convert the amount of your drink of choice to an equal amount of another drink. See the “Counting Your Drinks” Poster for more information.

For example:

- One 26 oz/750 ml of 40% spirits = 17.5 drinks
- 1 bottle of 12.5% wine = 5.5 drinks
- 1 can of 8% beer = 1.5 drinks

## Managing or reducing your drinking safely

Consider having a trusted friend or family member help you manage your alcohol supply so you do not go through it too quickly. This could include them keeping a back up supply in case access becomes more difficult in the future.

If reducing, make a goal. Think about how much you drink now and where you want to be. Keep this goal realistic for you.

### Pace and space out your drinks

- Decide how much you think you will need to stay comfortable for the day and set that amount aside.
- Keep a schedule and track your drinks. Pour one drink at a time of spirits or wine into a cup or reusable bottle. Set aside beer can tabs, mark your bottles, or make a tally of how many drinks you’ve had. Slow down if you find you’re getting intoxicated quickly or drinking more than usual.
- Dilute your drinks with water or juice or have ‘drink spacers’ by alternating with water or juice.

Consider switching to drinks with less alcohol per volume. Drinking beer instead of wine, or wine instead of hard liquor, can help you to pace yourself more easily.

Do not share drink containers or glasses as COVID-19 can be transferred this way.



## Buying alcohol

Consider moving away from cash. If you have resources you may wish to buy gift cards or prepaid credit cards, or set up a bank account. Stores may not accept cash.

**Try to set up alcohol delivery through the store, a support/outreach worker, or a friend.** Consider designating one friend to buy alcohol for a group. It will be easier to manage your consumption if you have frequent deliveries of smaller amounts, for example enough for one day.

**If you are in isolation or quarantine and cannot go to the store,** contact someone who can deliver the alcohol to you or connect you by phone to a doctor if you need help with withdrawal.

## Medications

There are medications available that can help with symptoms of withdrawal and craving, ask your doctor.

## Need help to make a safer drinking plan or help for withdrawal?

- Contact your doctor or a clinic for a phone appointment to get help with withdrawal. It can be possible to withdraw from alcohol at home.
- Contact an addiction medicine clinic. They may be able to help you with a plan or prescribe medication.
  - The phone # for the addiction medicine clinic in your community is \_\_\_\_\_
- Contact your support worker, nurse or outreach team to help make a plan.
- Call 811 if you are having withdrawal but are unsure if you should go to the hospital.
- Call 911 if you have: sudden chest pain, shortness of breath, or difficult breathing, OR if you are in severe withdrawal (shaking and sweating a lot) and have a history of seizures.

We would like to thank the members of the Eastside Illicit Drinkers Group for Education (EIDGE).