

**Alcohol and Infectious Diseases Technical Meeting, Cape Town, South Africa, 15-18 July 2008.**

In July 2008, the World Health Organization (WHO) co-sponsored the technical meeting hosted by the South African Medical Research Council (MRC) to review evidence relating to the linkages between alcohol consumption and selected infectious diseases and examine potential causal impacts of alcohol use on both the incidence and course of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (TB). Meeting participants came from different WHO regions and various disciplines, including biostatistics, epidemiology, hepatology, immunology, psychiatry, psychology, and sociology.

A review of the evidence produced a general consensus among participants that there was conclusive evidence of a causal linkage between heavy drinking patterns and/or alcohol use disorders and the incidence of active TB, and that these exposure categories was also causally linked to worsening of the disease course for both TB and HIV. Alcohol consumption was also shown to have a negative effect on adherence to HIV medication regimens. Participants in the technical meeting, however, concluded that while alcohol use was consistently associated with the prevalence and incidence of HIV, further research was needed to substantiate causality.

It was recognized that studies presently available, from a limited range of populations, have found little effect of drinking on reported condom use during sex, in comparisons of sexual events with and without drinking. Taking into account both these findings and findings of a relationship between alcohol use and sexual risk behaviour in other frames, it has been concluded that the relationship between alcohol use and risky sex is complex and reflects multiple underlying causal and non-causal processes.

The meeting participants discussed the need for further work to test suspected causal linkages between alcohol and other infectious diseases such as pneumonia, hepatitis C and some common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). There was a consensus that priority should be given to undertaking research to establish whether there is a causal linkage between alcohol harmful use of alcohol and the incidence of HIV. Clarification of these linkages could have implications on the relevant prevention and treatment policy and programme developments as well as on the estimates of alcohol-attributable burden of disease in upcoming and future global burden of disease studies.

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Meeting participants included Dolly Baliunas, Scott Braithwaite, Bob Cook, Thomas Greenfield, Judith Hahn, Helen Jackson, Saidi Kapiga, Connie Kekwaletswe, Knut Lönnroth, Monica Malta, Anthony Mbewu, Neo Morojele, Landon Myer, Manuela Neuman, Charles Parry (Co-organiser), Anne Pithey, Vladimir Poznyak, Jürgen Rehm (Co-organiser), Robin Room, Michelle Schneider, Paul Shuper, Wendy Spearman, Bundit Sormpaisarn, Theo Vos, and Xiaojun Xiang.