



This information sheet is the fifth in a series that will be produced by the Public Health Wales central alcohol team. This sheet is designed for Public Health Wales's staff and their partners to increase the understanding of the evidence base and impact of the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol.

Minimum unit pricing will tackle the issue of excessive alcohol consumption and heavily discounted alcohol sold in supermarkets and off-licences. This approach aims to reduce alcohol consumption and curb practices such as 'pre-loading' before a night out.

What is alcohol minimum pricing?

Alcohol minimum pricing is a policy of setting a minimum price for a unit of alcohol below which it cannot be sold. This will mean that drinks with a high number of units and which are currently being sold at low prices, will see the greatest change in price.

Why is legislation to bring in minimum pricing being considered?

Minimum pricing is being considered as part of a wider framework to rebalance the UK's relationship with alcohol. The Government considers minimum pricing to be the most effective way of reducing alcohol consumption/ alcohol-related harm, and believes decisive action to address the affordability of alcohol is required.

Strong evidence supports the link between alcohol price, income, affordability and consumption, and on the direct link between alcohol price, income and harms. As alcohol becomes more affordable, consumption increases. As consumption increases, harm increases. Alcohol is now 45% more affordable than in 1980.

Which drinks will be affected?

Minimum pricing will not affect every drink – only those which are sold at below the minimum unit price, such as cheap spirits and white cider. It is not a tax. The extra money will go to drinks producers and retailers, not the Government.

Why should I pay more for my drink?

The more you drink, the greater the risk of health and social problems. Research suggests that higher prices can help to reduce consumption levels and, therefore, the harm to health and society. There are significant costs linked to increased pressure on health services and the criminal justice system. Minimum unit pricing could help to reduce these costs, as well as benefiting employers who lose productivity due to the effects of alcohol on their employees.

How would you work out the effect of this on the price of a drink?

At the moment, a two litre plastic bottle of strong cider (15 units) sells for around £3-£4. Under the proposed minimum pricing scheme of, say, 45p per unit, it couldn't be sold for less than £7.50 (15 units x 45p = £6.75).

More examples are given below.

Minimum alcohol pricing - 45p per unit



Is minimum pricing just another tax?

No. It would be more targeted than a tax because increases in price would be linked to the number of units in a drink, meaning those who drink more would pay more. A tax would not necessarily bring about the required increase in the price of alcohol as traders could avoid passing on the increase to consumers or sell alcohol below-cost. Plus the extra money goes to the drinks producers and retailers, not the Government.

Who would benefit from alcohol minimum pricing?

People who are drinking at potentially harmful levels are most likely to benefit from the effects of minimum pricing. Research from Finland shows the potential of higher alcohol prices to protect the most disadvantaged members of society against alcohol-related problems. The introduction of minimum unit pricing will also have an impact upon young people who purchase alcohol from retail outlets.

Will this mean people living in poverty suffer more?

Research shows that people on a low income or who are living in deprived areas are more likely to suffer from a long term illness as a result of drinking too much. People who live in the most deprived areas of the UK are six times more likely to die an alcohol-related death than those in the least deprived areas. Minimum pricing can potentially reduce levels of harmful drinking in these groups, meaning the risk of alcohol-related harm would be reduced.

So why 45 pence per unit?

On the face of it, there seems to be little difference between the 45p minimum unit price for alcohol now being proposed and the 40p figure put forward earlier this year. But in terms of consumption levels - and the subsequent criminal and health costs - the shift is significant.

Research by Sheffield University shows that at 45p consumption drops by 4.3% - a 75% greater effect than would be seen at 40p. In terms of deaths over a 10-year period, the impact is nearly double. A 45p minimum will save over 2,000 lives compared to fewer than 1,200 for 40p. The effect on crime is also two-fold.

But what the research also shows is that another 5p on the minimum price to bring it to 50p - as Scotland has done - would see a similar increase in impact, which is why campaigners have been pushing for more.

Another area of interest - and possible controversy - is the effect this will have on moderate drinkers. The research shows a 45p minimum price also affects the buying habits of moderate drinkers, reducing consumption by 2.3%. That is greater than the reduction likely to be seen in young hazardous drinkers - the so-called binge drinkers.

Scotland have already introduced minimum pricing, right?

Well, yes and no. Yes, 50p pence per unit was introduced but it has been challenged in the European Law Courts by the drinks industry. Follow the story on the BBC News links below...

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-20526338>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-20533189>

What does the research say?

The Government has carried out a review of the evidence base around this topic and the subsequent report can be found by following the link below:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/alcohol-drugs/alcohol/impacts-alcohol-price-review?view=Binary>

Have other countries had success with the introduction of minimum pricing?

Yes... here are a few examples.

Canada... <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2011.03763.x/abstract;jsessionid=07B2F2D4850EFE92A439BFF9F599134A.d02t02?deniedAccessCustomisedMessage=&userIsAuthenticated=false>

Finland (although this one looks at a reduction in price and the negative health impacts)...
<http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/content/168/10/1110.short>

And of course Scotland....

http://scottish.parliament.uk/S4_FinanceCommittee/Reports/fir12-AlcoholBill.pdf

And The World Health Organisation support the concept too...

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/evidence-for-the-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-interventions-to-reduce-alcohol-related-harm>

Is this all we need to stop alcohol related harm?

No, far from it. But with improved awareness, action on availability of alcohol, education and ABI training, it is a step in the right direction to shifting the culture of drinking across Wales



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