

# Drinking cultures and social occasions – sporting events

## Fact Sheet

Reducing harm from alcohol

**This study, funded by VicHealth and produced by the *Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre*, provides evidence that acute intoxication, motor vehicle accidents and injuries due to assaults increase around major sporting events in Victoria and generally rises the day before.**

### Intent

Ambulance, police and hospital workers have noticed an increase in alcohol-related incidents around major sporting events. However, there has been relatively little evidence to support this observation. There has also been increasing media and community concern about alcohol intoxication during major sporting occasions.

The results from this study are designed to inform appropriate intervention and prevention strategies to minimise the impact on the health sector and the community's safety. The findings will be shared with Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and Emergency Department personnel and public health agencies.

### Study

For a range of major sporting events, the study examines:

- ambulance data
- hospital admissions data
- emergency department presentations
- motor vehicle accidents
- police data for all assaults and family violence incidents (this data includes all recorded incidents, not just those related to alcohol).

### Methodology

The data was collected from 2000 to 2009 for metropolitan Melbourne. It includes ambulance attendances from the *Ambo Project: Alcohol and Drug Related Ambulance Attendances*, a collaboration between Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and Ambulance Victoria with funding from the Victorian Department of Health.

Hospital emergency department presentations for acute alcohol intoxication, assaults and motor vehicle accidents were taken from the *Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset*, which includes detailed clinical, demographic and administrative data on all emergency department presentations in Victoria.

Hospital admissions for acute alcohol intoxication, assaults and motor vehicle accidents were taken from the *Victorian Admitted Episode Dataset*, which includes detailed clinical, demographic and administrative data on all admitted patient hospital separations in Victoria.

Police data on assaults and family violence incidents were sourced from the Victoria Police Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) database.

Serious road incident data were derived from the VicRoads Road Network Database (RNDB), which is compiled from Victoria Police information.

The research includes all cases recorded from 6:00am to 6:00am the following day. This is to reflect the fact that many cases occur after midnight.

The days before and after the sporting events were also analysed.

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November 2012  
Publication number:  
K-063-ATUV  
ISBN: 978-1-921822-78-0

## Key findings

- Fridays and Saturdays are big drinking days, and the warmer months are peak times for alcohol-related harms in Melbourne. For example, on Saturdays, there are an average 25 ambulance presentations, 13 emergency department presentations, and seven admissions for intoxication, compared to 10, five and four respectively, on Mondays. Note: The numbers refer to records between 6am and 6am the next day to account for overnight admissions.
- The busiest months of the year for emergency services responding to alcohol intoxication are December, November, February and March, in that order. For assaults, they are December, March, February and January. The quietest month is July.
- There are significant increases in the lead up to major sporting events, particularly the day before Melbourne Cup Day and the AFL\* Grand Final.

## Alcohol intoxication

- The day before and the day of the Melbourne Cup and AFL Grand Final represent times of significantly elevated alcohol intoxication resulting in ambulance attendances, Emergency Department presentations and hospital admissions.
- Alcohol intoxication harms on these days affected all groups – the general population, males, females and youth.

## Assaults

- Increased cases of assaults occur on the day before Melbourne Cup, Formula One Grand Prix and the AFL Grand Final.
- There are significant increases in assaults on the day of the Melbourne Cup, the AFL Grand Final, international cricket and, for males, the Formula One Grand Prix.
- For males and females, assaults spike on Fridays and Saturdays.

## Young people

- People aged 25 and under are most likely to experience acute intoxication and assault related to alcohol on Melbourne Cup Day, AFL Grand Final and Formula One Grand Prix.
- There is an increase in motor vehicle accidents among young people on the day of the Melbourne Cup and the AFL Grand Final.

## Next steps

This research provides a starting point for considering resource allocation, staffing and funding across a wide range of areas, from emergency and health services, to hospitality, transport and entertainment.

The data also gives valuable guidance for targeting alcohol intervention and prevention initiatives and health education campaigns to minimise harms associated with alcohol consumption.

This research clearly shows that major sporting events are associated with higher levels of alcohol intoxication and harm in the community, particularly among young people. There is a need to assess the relationship between risky alcohol consumption and sport, including the role that alcohol sponsorship plays in embedding this strong association.

\* Australian Football League