

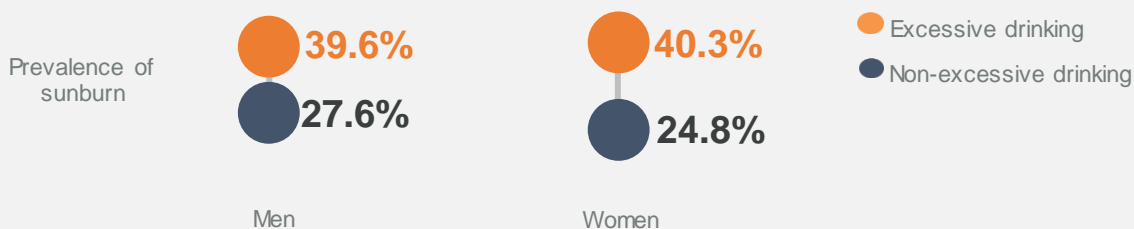
New Yorkers who report excessive drinking are significantly more likely to report sunburn



Excessive drinking is associated with higher rates of sunburn among American adults.^{1,2} Research shows that when people excessively drink, they are less likely to use sunscreen.³ Drinking alcohol also reduces the amount of time a person can spend in the sun before their skin burns.⁴ In New York State (NYS), men who report excessive drinking* are 1.4 times as likely to experience sunburn and women who report excessive drinking are 1.6 times as likely to experience sunburn as compared to their counterparts who do not report excessive drinking (Fig. 1). A higher prevalence of sunburn among adults who report excessive drinking as compared to adults who do not report excessive drinking is also observed across all racial and ethnic groups (data not pictured).

Having five or more sunburns in one's lifetime more than doubles their risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer.⁵ There is growing evidence that drinking alcohol also increases the risk of melanoma.⁶ In NYS, among those under 34 years, melanoma rates are higher for women compared to men, which may be related to tanning behaviors. Men 60 years and older have the highest rates of melanoma. Compared to women, men are more likely to work in outdoor occupations.⁷ While melanoma occurs less frequently among people of color, when it does occur, it is often diagnosed at a more advanced stage.⁸ Thus, the concerns of drinking and sunburn apply to people of all skin tones.

Figure 1: Age-adjusted prevalence of at least one sunburn[^] in the past year among adults who report excessive drinking vs. adults who do not report excessive drinking, by sex



Data Source: NYS Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021; Prevalence estimates are age-adjusted to the US2000 standard population.

*In this analysis, excessive drinking was defined as respondents who reported binge or heavy drinking on one or more occasions in the past 30 days. Binge drinking is defined as consuming 4 or more drinks for women and 5 or more drinks for men on an occasion. Heavy drinking is defined as consuming 8 or more drinks per week for women and 15 or more drinks per week for men.

[^]We do not know the exact context in which the sunburns occurred and cannot draw conclusions regarding sunburn causation. Further work is needed in this area.

Public Health Opportunity

A coordinated approach, including strategies outlined in the [NYS Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan](#), includes:

- Providing all individuals with information about adopting healthier behaviors such as limiting alcohol consumption to one drink in a day for women and two drinks in a day for men, or not drinking alcohol, and protecting their skin when outside on a sunny day.
- Implementing policy and environmental changes that [facilitate sun safety](#) and that [reduce excessive drinking and its related harms](#) to address some of the challenges of individual behavior change and possibly influence social norms over time.
- Addressing both cancer risk behaviors within the clinical setting when appropriate. The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends [screening for unhealthy alcohol use in adults 18 years or older](#) and providing brief behavioral counseling interventions to persons engaged in risky or hazardous drinking and [behavioral counseling on skin cancer prevention](#) for fair-skinned patients aged 6 months to 24 years. The American Academy of Dermatology Association also includes [guidelines for people of color](#) to check their skin for skin cancer.

For more information, please send an e-mail to BCDER@health.ny.gov with IFA #2023-02 in the subject line. To access other Information for Action reports, visit the NYSDOH public website: http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/injury_prevention/information_for_action/index.htm

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