

550,000 North East adults risking their health by drinking too much alcohol

Balance, the North East alcohol office, estimates 550,000 people are drinking above the recommended limit of more than 14 units to stay "low risk"

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By [Chris Knight](#)

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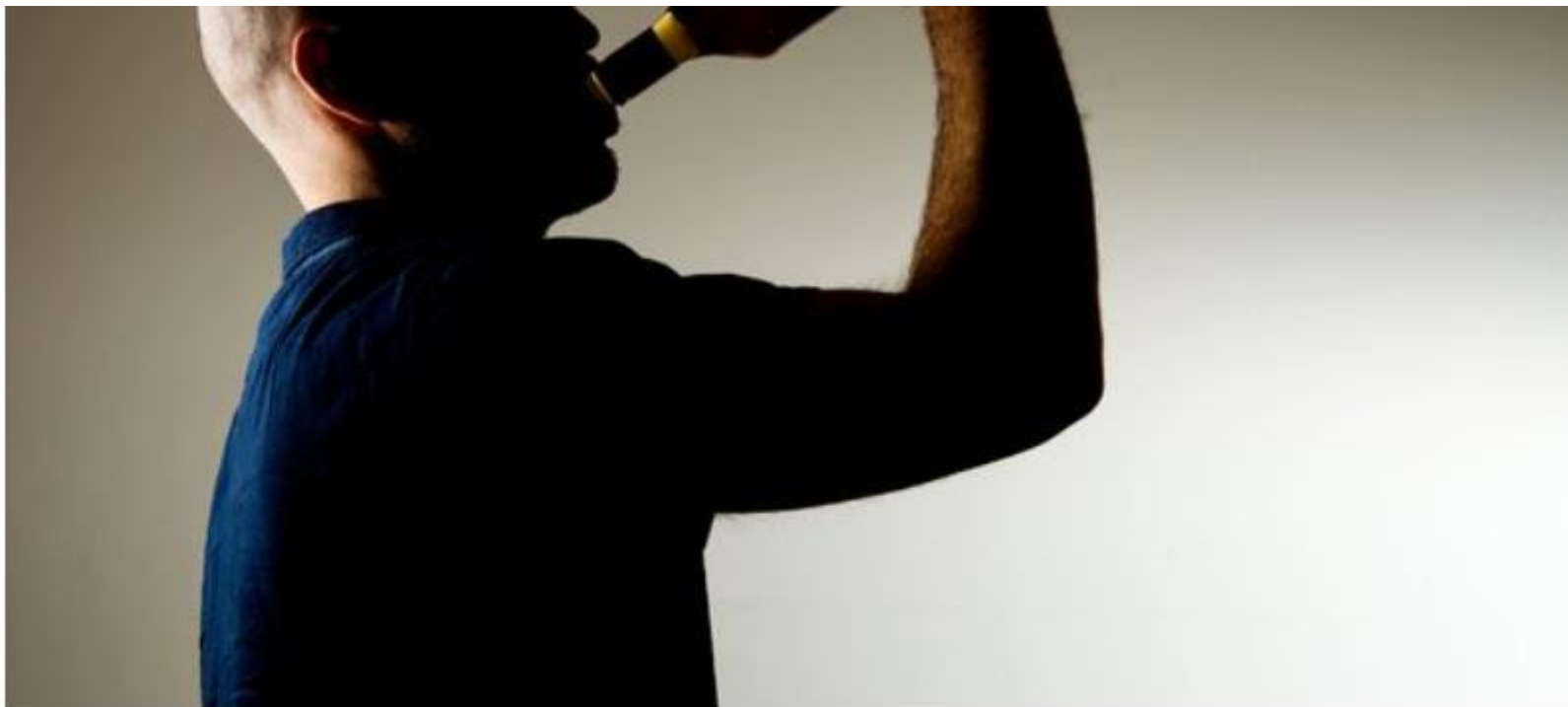
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Balance, the North East alcohol office, has published the report "Alcohol: Are we Kidding Ourselves?" (Image: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire)

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Hundreds of thousands of North East adults are increasing their risk of cancer, heart disease, and dementia by drinking too much alcohol, according to a new report.

Alcohol awareness charity Balance estimates 550,000 people are drinking above the recommended weekly limit of no more than 14 units to stay “low risk”.

The report titled “Alcohol: Are we Kidding Ourselves?” indicates 89% of people in the North East drink alcohol in comparison to the national average of 78%.

More than a quarter of adults (26%) are drinking above the Chief Medical Officer’s low risk guidelines of 14 units a week compared to one in five across the UK.

Of these, almost nine in 10 adults considered themselves to only be either “light or moderate” drinkers.

Colin Shevills, director of Balance, said: “The worrying conclusion is that thousands of people in our region are putting themselves at greater risk of premature death and disease from alcohol while considering themselves moderate drinkers and remaining oblivious to the risks they are taking.

“Evidence is now very clear that any level of regular drinking raises the risks of cancer, but drinking over 14

units a week increases even more the risks of cancer, heart disease, stroke, dementia, high blood pressure and diabetes.

“Heavy drinking is often blamed on younger people but it is people in their 40s and 50s who are putting their health most at risk, although they might feel they are drinking responsibly.”

The cost of alcohol to the North East

In 2015/16 alcohol was estimated to have cost the North East around £1.01 billion, including:

- £209 million in NHS and healthcare for services such as hospital admissions, A&E attendances, ambulance callouts and treatment for alcohol dependency.
- £331 million in crime and disorder, including 55,300 cases of criminal damage, 154,900 cases of theft and 20,000 cases of violence against the person.
- £353 million lost to local businesses and employers through absenteeism, lost productivity and alcohol related deaths
- £121 million in costs to children and adults' social services and substance misuse services.

The report surveyed 800 people and found men typically drink the most with more than third (34%) drinking above 14 units a week in comparison to 19% of women.

Nearly one in 10 adults - an estimated 169,000 people - are drinking more than twice the weekly low-risk guidelines.





Balance, the North East alcohol office, has published the report "Alcohol: Are we Kidding Ourselves?" (Image: Johnny Green/PA Wire)

People aged between 45 and 54 were found to be most likely group to exceed the recommended limit, with a quarter drinking between 15 to 28 units a week

Mr Shevill added: "Our survey shows people clearly believe they have a right to know what they are drinking and the risks associated.

"Most, if not all, major alcohol brands are refusing to feature health warnings or information about units on their products and so drinkers are deliberately being kept in the dark.

"This is at a time when alcohol is far too cheap and far too heavily promoted."

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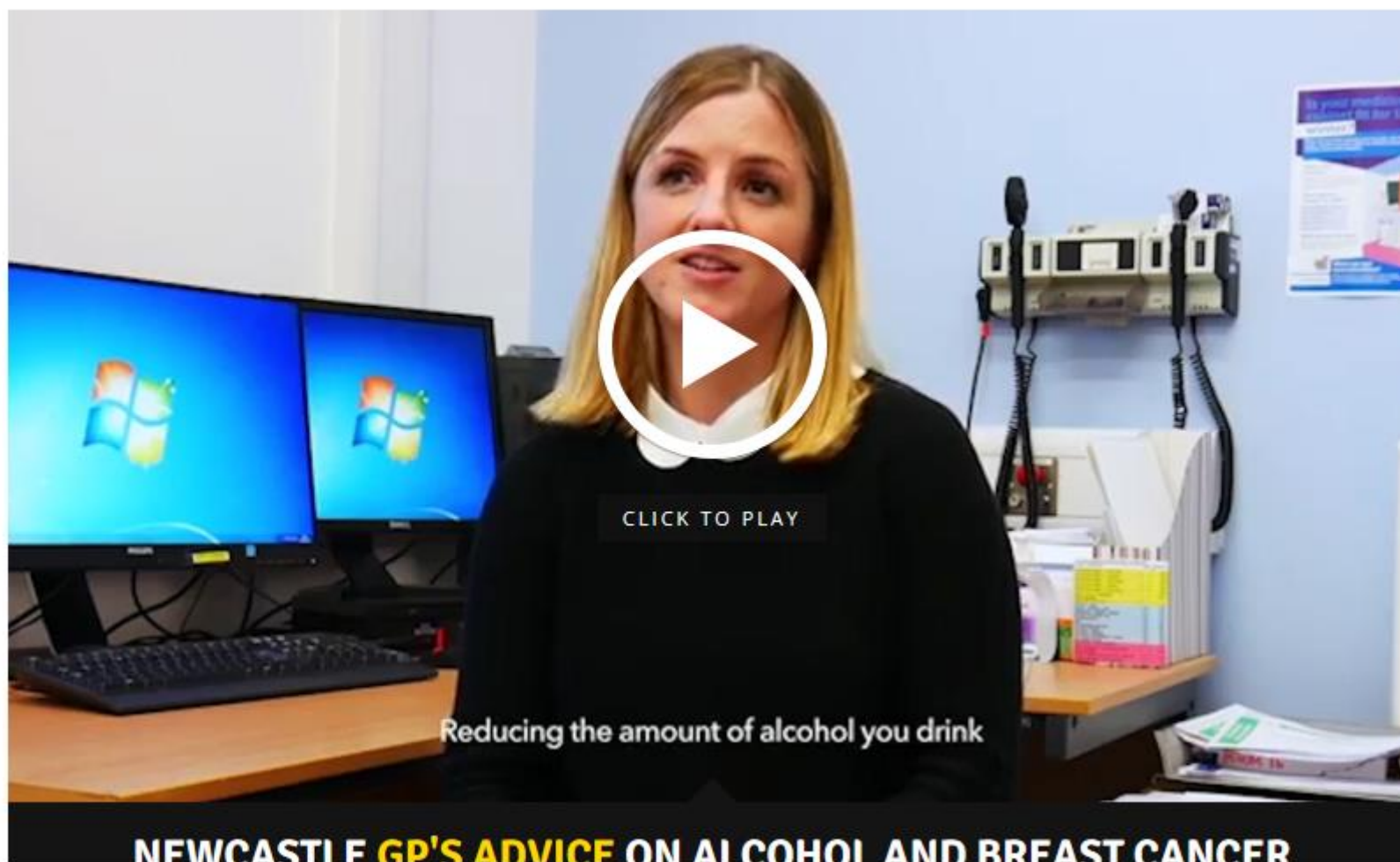
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The report also found 70% of people in the North East believe the UK has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, and that 53% of adults in the region would support the introduction of minimum unit pricing.

Alice Wiseman, director of public health for Gateshead and alcohol lead for North East Directors of Public Health, said: "Alcohol is related to numerous chronic health conditions, but the worrying truth is that many people in our region are not aware their level of their drinking may be raising their risks.

"It is even more worrying that those who experience the greatest levels of alcohol related harm live in some

of the region's most deprived neighbourhoods.



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"We need to keep raising awareness about the chronic health conditions linked to alcohol and target actions on the groups where alcohol causes most harm, counteracting the influence of the alcohol industry which makes alcohol too cheap, too available and too glamorous through its advertising.

"Alcohol also creates a burden on our local services in terms of accidents, disorder, crime and loss of productivity.

"As the UK Government reviews its approach to alcohol harm and sets out its new national alcohol strategy, it is time we looked at measures such as minimum unit pricing and health warnings on labels which would have public support."

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