

Trends in number of deaths due to alcohol-related liver diseases between 2017 and 2022 in Japan

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Dear Editor,

Movement restrictions during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have inflicted stress and affected drinking behavior [1-3]. In Japan, a study has shown that approximately one-fourth of the subjects who underwent medical checkups increased their alcohol intake [4]. In addition, the rate of admissions for alcohol-related liver diseases (ARLDs) or pancreatitis during the COVID-19 pandemic period was 1.2 times compared to the pre-pandemic period [5]. There is a concern about an increase in alcohol-related deaths; according to the latest statistical data, the present study investigated changes in number of deaths due to ARLDs.

Data were obtained from the website of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). Changes in number of deaths due to ARLDs between 2017 and 2022 are shown in **Figure 1**.

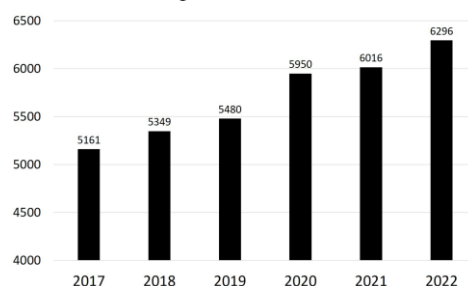


Figure 1. Changes in number of deaths due to alcohol-related liver diseases between 2017 and 2022 (Source: Author's own elaboration)

The number of deaths was increasing since 2017. Further increase was seen in 2020, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible factors were as follows:

- (1) Increased alcohol consumption owing to stress during movement restrictions.
- (2) Visiting restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (3) Direct effects of COVID-19 on ARLDs.

The average number (per year) increased by 757.3 in the post-COVID-19 period (from 2020 to 2022, 6087.3) from the pre-COVID-19 period (from 2017 to 2019, 5330.0). Increasing alcohol-related diseases have become a major public health concern in Japan. Therefore, the Japanese MHLW released the guideline for health-conscious drinking in February 2024 to promote the spread of knowledge on the risks associated with alcohol consumption. Awareness-raising activities to reduce inappropriate drinking are important.

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Ethical statement: The author stated that this study did not need the approval of the ethics committee because all data were open-access in the Japanese MHLW database.

Declaration of interest: No conflict of interest is declared by the author.

Data sharing statement: Data supporting the findings and conclusions are available upon request from the author.

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