

Alcohol and Cancer in Mexico: How Industry Marketing Hides Cancer Risk

Why It Matters Now

Cancer cases are projected to nearly double worldwide by 2050.¹ In Mexico, the increase is expected to be even steeper: the National Cancer Institute projects a 60–80% rise in cancer incidence by 2040.² Globally, more than 740,000 new cancer cases are attributable to alcohol consumption every year, making alcohol a key preventable risk factor for cancer.³

Yet, many people don't know that alcohol causes cancer.^{4,5} In a 2024 poll conducted by Vital Strategies, more than 1 in 4 Mexicans (29%) did not know that alcohol consumption increases cancer risk, with only 71% correctly identifying it as a risk factor.⁶ The connection between alcohol and cancer was the least understood of the harms tested, trailing far behind liver disease (99%) and violence against women/domestic violence (98%).

Governments have evidence-based tools at their disposal to reduce alcohol's harms, cancer among them: WHO recommends higher alcohol taxes, marketing restrictions and restrictions on alcohol availability as the most cost-effective policies.⁷ In addition, WHO calls for mandatory, prominent cancer warning labels on all alcohol containers to raise public awareness and reduce consumption.⁸ Paired with public education, these measures can counter the alcohol industry's efforts to sow doubt about alcohol's harms and drive consumption.

This snapshot uses evidence from social media and digital news to capture the alcohol industry's efforts to foster confusion about cancer and other health harms, including:



Positioning products in sports and wellness spaces and using direct health claims to make products appear "healthier."



Glamorizing products through youth-oriented events and by borrowing celebrity prestige.



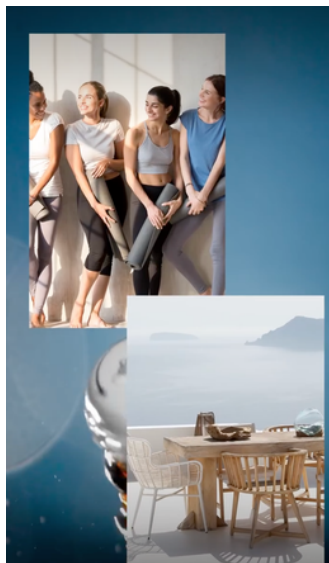
Heineken Mexico marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month ("Pink October"), despite alcohol increasing breast cancer risk.

What the Data Say

- **Alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen** and is causally linked to at least seven cancers, including breast, liver and bowel cancer (International Agency for Research on Cancer)⁴
- **Cancer is the third leading cause of death in Mexico**, behind heart disease and diabetes, with malignant tumors accounting for 11.6% of all deaths (INEGI 2025; INEGI 2026)^{9,10}
- **73.7% of Mexicans ages 12–65 have consumed alcohol in their lifetime**—up from 71.0% in 2016 (ENCODAT 2025, Secretaría de Salud/INSP)¹¹
- **112 deaths every day in Mexico**, or 41,000 a year, are associated with alcohol use (El Poder Del Consumidor/INEGI)¹²
- **Nearly 60% of Mexicans would support price increases on alcohol**, 83% say their support for taxes would grow if the revenue funded social goods like education and health care, and 84% support alcohol warning labels (RASA/Vital Strategies)⁶

Can You Tell Alcohol Causes Cancer From the Way the Industry:

Makes health claims



amstelultra Instagram

Heineken's Amstel Ultra frames its lower-calorie beer as a weight management tool, even though it contains 4.0% ABV. The brand uses language such as "the best lifestyle is to take care of yourself fewer calories, more enjoyment, only Amstel Ultra." Health claims like these (low sugar, low calorie) create a "health halo," leading consumers to see the product as healthier overall and underestimate its alcohol content.^{13,14}



Cedis Baja California

HEINEKEN México Facebook

Heineken Mexico marked Breast Cancer Awareness Month with a "commitment to health and well-being" and to organizing conferences and activities to raise awareness of the importance of preventing and detecting breast cancer, without disclosing that its own product is a cause of the disease.

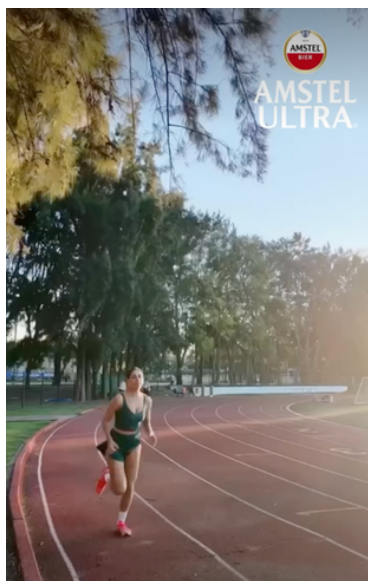


Informador.mx article

The popular Jalisco outlet El Informador published an article claiming "moderate" beer consumption offers health benefits and even has "anti-cancer properties."¹⁵ While the alcohol industry's link to this specific article is unclear, it has a well-documented pattern of funding research and messaging that casts doubt on the harms its product causes—content that is reproduced in media coverage.^{16,17}

Can You Tell Alcohol Causes Cancer From the Way the Industry:

Infiltrates sports and wellness spaces



amstelultra Instagram

Heineken's Amstel Ultra—promoted as “light” for its lower calories, despite still carrying 4.0% ABV—sponsors running influencers and race activations across Mexico City, using calorie claims to create a “health halo” that enables the brand to infiltrate fitness and wellness culture, despite the harms its products pose to health.^{13,18}



coronaceromx Instagram

AB InBev/Grupo Modelo's Corona Cero markets its luxury resort on Corona Island, Colombia to Mexican audiences as “the first island free of single-use plastic,” tying the brand to environmental conservation, and as a wellness retreat, with posts describing “starting the morning on Corona Island with a yoga class” that fills guests “with energy and tranquility,” linking its products to wellness rather than to risks like cancer.



michelobultramx Instagram

AB InBev's Michelob Ultra, the official beer sponsor of the FIFA Club World Cup 2025, promotes its branded “superior access player of the match” trophy that is awarded to players after each game, allowing a beer brand to infiltrate a top sport tournament and borrow the prestige of its biggest stars.

Can You Tell Alcohol Causes Cancer From the Way the Industry:

Targets youth



UTVToluca X

Heineken Mexico runs "Smart Consumption" conferences inside universities using "responsible consumption" education to build direct relationships with student audiences. Industry-funded initiatives such as these tend to function as marketing and youth engagement, rather than educative programs that focus on alcohol harms, and have not been shown to reduce consumption.¹⁹



smirnoffmx Instagram

The alcohol industry is deeply embedded in Mexico's music festival scene, including all age concerts, such as Electric Daisy Carnival Mexico. Within this space, Diageo's Smirnoff ran a campaign letting attendees create personalized thermoses—a product that has driven a massive youth-led social media trend in recent years—using Gen-Z-coded language such as "FOMO" and "coolest." Marketing efforts like this help sustain a knowledge gap about alcohol and cancer, which is already particularly wide among young people.^{20,21}



dosequismx Instagram

Heineken's Dos Equis promotes its sponsorship of Comic Con Experience, the country's largest pop culture convention, using cosplay and video game-inspired language to embed its brand in gaming youth culture.²²

Can You Tell Alcohol Causes Cancer From the Way the Industry:

Enlists celebrities to promote products



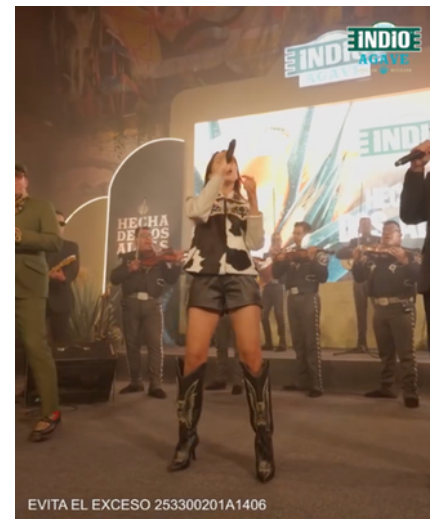
heinekenmexico Instagram

Heineken Mexico promotes its "responsible consumption" safe driving messaging through Formula 1 driver Sergio Pérez, using a strategy known as brand sharing: Heineken 0.0 carries near-identical branding to full-strength Heineken beer, meaning advertising ostensibly promoting a nonalcoholic choice simultaneously reinforces the core alcohol brand. Like other "responsible consumption" campaigns, it targets a harm the industry can appear to fix while functioning as marketing, whereas cancer risk offers no such opening.^{23,24}



tequilacazadores Instagram

Tequila Cazadores ran a campaign with Mexican actor and former professional footballer Cristo Fernández, releasing a signature cocktail recipe ("El Golazo") and co-branded "Fan Fútbol Kit," framing the tequila as a natural companion to watching and celebrating football matches.



Cerveza Indio Facebook

Heineken's Cerveza Indio launched its limited-edition beer Indio Agave around a collaboration between Mexican regional singer Majo Aguilar (nearly 4 million followers between Facebook and Instagram) and ska band Inspector. The alcohol industry pairs brands with celebrities to transfer their popularity and prestige onto its products, further distancing the brand from any association with cancer risk.²⁵

Key Takeaways

The alcohol industry sows confusion and doubt about the health harms its products cause by making health claims, infiltrating wellness and sports spaces and glamorizing its products, including among youth, using event and celebrity sponsorships.

For the public:

Alcohol consumption causes cancer. When the alcohol industry promotes its products in glamorous places and by glamorous people, remember what this marketing is working to obscure.

For researchers:

There's now clear data on the link between alcohol and cancer, but more evidence is needed to quantify this burden in Mexico. This data can help make the case for stronger alcohol policy that reduces the risk of developing cancer.

For decision-makers:

The evidence-based, cost-effective WHO policies to reduce alcohol harms, including higher alcohol taxes, have strong public backing here.⁶ These measures can counter the industry efforts documented in this brief by directly curbing alcohol consumption and signaling its harms.

About Canary!

Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI and expert analysis to identify emerging threats in digital environments. For more information on our methodology, visit our [website](#). This brief uses data collected between October 2024 and August 2025.

About Vital Strategies

Canary is a project of [Vital Strategies](#), a global public health organization that partners with governments and local organizations to tackle the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and injuries, using data and evidence to assess health and environmental threats and to move policy, practices and people. Our team of 400+ includes epidemiologists, policy experts, communicators, data analysts and others who work in 80+ countries around the world.

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