

Minimum unit pricing for alcohol begins today

The minimum unit price for alcohol of 50pence is introduced in Scotland from today.

The Scottish Government has suggested that alcohol related deaths will be cut by 392 and hospital admissions by 8,254 over the first five years of the policy.

Government guidance issued to those who sell alcohol states that “The whole of Scotland is affected by harm that results from alcohol.” and elsewhere “There is lots of evidence to show that as alcohol becomes more affordable, drinking increases, and as drinking increases so does harm.”



There is no period of grace allowed to those selling alcohol, and so the new pricing structure must be introduced immediately from today.

This makes Scotland the first country in the world to

introduce minimum pricing in this way to tackle the damage caused by cheaper high strength alcohol.

Speaking during a visit to a hospital ward treating patients with chronic liver problems, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "I am extremely proud that the eyes of the world will once again be on Scotland with the introduction of this legislation.

"Our action is bold and it is brave, and shows once again that we are leading the way in introducing innovative solutions to public health challenges.

"It's no secret that Scotland has a troubled relationship with alcohol. There are, on average, 22 alcohol-specific deaths every week in Scotland, and 697 hospital admissions and behind every one of these statistics is a person, a family, and a community badly affected by alcohol misuse.

"Given the clear and proven link between consumption and harm, minimum unit pricing is the most effective and efficient way to tackle the cheap, high strength alcohol that causes so much damage to so many families."

Health Secretary Shona Robison said: "We know we need to act now to change people's attitudes towards alcohol and I am confident that, with the introduction of minimum unit pricing, we are moving in the right direction. Alcohol misuse costs Scotland £3.6 billion each year – that's £900 for every adult in the country.

"Scotland has the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths in the UK – from today, I hope we will see that change."

Chief Medical Officer Dr Catherine Calderwood said: "As a nation we drink 40 per cent more than the low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week for men and women. Prior to the implementation of minimum unit pricing, those 14 units could be bought for just £2.52. This is absolutely

unacceptable.

“That is where this new legislation comes in, and I am confident that over the first five years of its operation, minimum unit pricing will reduce the number of alcohol-specific deaths by hundreds, and hospital admissions by thousands.”

Green MSP Alison Johnstone welcomes the policy but says that Holyrood’s health committee must revisit the policy at a later date and consider increasing the 50p rate.

Ms Johnstone said: “It’s such a shame that it has taken six long years to see this important public health policy come to fruition, nevertheless, its implementation today sends a clear message to the Scotch Whisky Association that their financial interests will not come before the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland and the advice of health charities and doctors.

“Greens were the only opposition MSPs to support minimum pricing in the 2007-11 parliament and we’re still of the view that Holyrood must revisit the policy in two years’ time and consider the possibility of increasing the 50p rate as part of Scotland’s continued efforts to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.”

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs MSP said :“We’re awaiting with interest to see what effect the introduction of minimum pricing has on Scotland’s relationship with alcohol.

“This is new territory and we need to analyse what effect this will have on consumer behaviour.

“That’s why the Scottish Conservatives supported the introduction of a sunset clause, so that if minimum pricing proves to be ineffective then it can be scrapped.”

