

A guide to the

# Responsible Service of Alcohol



## Contents

<b>The liquor industry</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<i>Golden rules of RSA</i> .....	3
<b>Benefits of responsible service</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Facts about alcohol</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<i>Alcoholic content of drinks</i> .....	6
<i>Blood alcohol concentration</i> .....	6
<i>Effects of alcohol</i> .....	7
Physical factors .....	7
Other factors .....	7
<i>Sobering up</i> .....	8
<i>Responsible consumption</i> .....	9
<b>Intoxication</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<i>Is it the responsibility of:</i> .....	10
Why do we have a law that states a licensee cannot serve an intoxicated customer? .....	11
<i>Signs of intoxication</i> .....	13
<b>Strategies for responsible service</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<i>Strategies to prevent intoxication</i> .....	15
Free water .....	15
Adopt a house policy .....	16
Train staff .....	16
Recording incidents .....	16
Safe transport options .....	17
Drink spiking .....	17
Prevent drink spiking .....	18
<b>Refusal of service</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<i>Be alert</i> .....	19
<i>T-A-K-E C-A-R-E</i> .....	19
<i>Body language</i> .....	21
<i>Distance</i> .....	21
<b>Underage</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Minors on licensed premises .....	22
Minors can't drink on licensed premises .....	22
Minors supplying liquor on licensed premises .....	22
Evidence of age .....	23
<i>Strategies to prevent underage drinking</i> .....	24
<b>Packaged liquor</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Functions</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<i>Booking the function</i> .....	26
<i>Prior to the function</i> .....	26
<i>Function operations</i> .....	26
<i>Underage</i> .....	27
<i>Post function</i> .....	27

# The liquor industry

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The liquor industry is a major industry in Victoria. It includes restaurants, cafes, bars, hotels, motels, gaming venues, resorts, caterers, wineries and packaged liquor retailers.

In Victoria the liquor industry is regulated by the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (the Act). The Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR) administers this Act. A liquor licence is required to supply liquor (alcohol). A person who has a liquor licence is called a licensee. They must comply with strict rules, including not serving alcohol to:

- intoxicated persons
- underage persons
- customers outside the conditions set down on their licence.

Licensees should develop ways to monitor the service of alcohol. This will help them to meet their responsibilities under the Act and contribute to minimising the risk of alcohol-related harm. The Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) program helps licensees and their staff to develop policies and procedures for the service of alcohol based on the strategies that are discussed in this program.

The RSA program also provides staff with the knowledge and awareness to responsibly serve alcohol in licensed premises.

In serving alcohol, you wear a number of different hats. You are:

- an enforcement officer ensuring that no one breaks any liquor laws
- a salesperson knowledgeable about your products
- a cleaner making sure premises are clean and tidy
- a good host helping to create a friendly atmosphere
- a safety officer thinking about the wellbeing of customers and staff to reduce any risks.

In general, alcohol is consumed responsibly but it can cause harm if misused. It is therefore important to supply it in a way that will help to minimise any potential harm. This means thinking about who you are serving, how much you are supplying, and the wellbeing of the customer.

One vital element of providing hospitality is to make sure that customers have an enjoyable time. The liquor industry provides customers with:

- an enjoyable atmosphere, where friends and family can come together
- good food, drink and entertainment
- jobs for bar staff, waiters, live performers and tradespeople.

When alcohol is abused, it can cause harm to individuals and the community. It plays a significant role in:

- road and pedestrian fatalities
- assaults and other criminal offences
- domestic violence
- hospital admittance due to falls, accidents, assaults and illness
- disruption to the amenity of areas surrounding licensed premises.

## Golden rules of RSA

It is against the law to serve alcohol to an intoxicated customer. Serving alcohol to an intoxicated customer also places the customer at risk. They may hurt themselves in the premises or on the way home. There are four things to remember when responsibly serving alcohol:

- **do not** serve anyone who is underage
- **recognise** intoxication and try not to serve anyone to the point of obvious intoxication
- **do not** serve anyone who is already intoxicated
- **discourage** people from taking part in activities that may cause harm to themselves and others.

# Benefits of responsible service

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When alcohol is served and consumed responsibly, the liquor industry, staff, customers and the community all benefit.

Everyone benefits when alcohol is served responsibly. If staff better understand the product they sell, their job skills are improved, and they will have a more pleasant work environment without an intoxicated customer. Excessive drinking makes life more difficult for people within the industry. They have to put up with:

- abusive customers
- harassment
- possible violence.

Licensees should be aware that their premises are potentially more attractive, and profitable, if they avoid the problems caused by intoxicated customers.

Benefits to a business for improving RSA include:

- an improved or more pleasant atmosphere
- a good reputation
- greater customer satisfaction
- less damage done to the premises
- reduced potential legal problems
- less police attendance
- higher staff morale leading to greater productivity and less staff turnover.

When customers drink responsibly it is good for business because other customers:

- feel safe and stay longer
- tell their friends and attract more customers like themselves
- come back!

The industry, the community, staff and customers benefit from reducing the problems caused by alcohol abuse and ensuring the safety of customers.

**List the benefits of serving alcohol responsibly.**

**For staff:**

**For customers:**

**For the community:**

**For the business:**

# Facts about alcohol

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This section discusses some facts about alcohol. You are not expected to become an expert on alcohol however, it is important to know the effects of the product you are serving. You will find this information useful both in your work and personally.

Alcohol, if abused, is a dangerous product. If you drink alcohol to the extent that your body cannot process it, it is called alcohol poisoning which can result in severe illness and could lead to death. It is important that people serving alcohol understand how much alcohol they are providing to their customers.

## Alcoholic content of drinks

Alcohol is a drug that depresses the central nervous system. It slows down the part of the brain that controls behaviour. While people become more outgoing after a few drinks, it is the loss of control over their behaviour that becomes a concern.

The intoxicating ingredient in alcoholic drinks is known as ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol is also known as ethanol or pure alcohol. This ingredient is common to all alcoholic drinks however, it occurs in different concentrations in each type of alcoholic drink, such as beer, wine and spirits.

A standard drink is typically defined as a drink that contains approximately 10 grams of pure alcohol.

This amount is normally contained in:

- 30mls of spirits
- 60mls of port
- 100mls of red or white wine
- 100mls of sparkling wine
- 285mls (a pot) of full-strength beer.

A standard drink and a standard sized glass are not the same thing. Wine and sparkling wine are often served in a 200ml glass. This would contain 20 grams of pure alcohol (i.e. the equivalent of two standard drinks). Wine can also be served in 250ml cans that would contain 25 grams of pure alcohol (i.e. the equivalent of two and a half standard drinks).

Ready to drink spirits (RTDs) are increasingly popular in the Victorian liquor market. Presented in 375ml bottles and cans, most RTDs will contain 1.2 to 1.7 standard drinks, and some have approximately seven per cent alcohol, which contains as much as 2.4 standard drinks.

## Blood alcohol concentration

As a person drinks, alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream. It is absorbed through the stomach walls and the intestines. The bloodstream carries the alcohol to the brain. One of the first effects of alcohol is the loss of judgement and inhibitions.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream. It is measured by the number of grams of alcohol in 100mls of blood. For example, a BAC of .05 means .05 grams of alcohol in 100ml of blood.

BAC rises as more alcohol is consumed. Moments after it is consumed, alcohol can be found in all tissues, organs and secretions of the body. Alcohol in carbonated drinks, such as sparkling wines and mixed drinks, usually enters the bloodstream more quickly.

The effects of alcohol in these carbonated drinks are felt more quickly.

As BAC increases there may be a temporary loss of coordination and a temporary loss of memory. Heavy drinking may affect a person's sense of balance or ability to judge distances. At some stage, the loss of control may become so great that we say the person is drunk.

## Effects of alcohol

Intoxication begins when the first drink of alcohol is consumed and commences its passage through the human body. When alcohol builds up in a person's bloodstream, it can significantly affect the drinker's understanding of events and their outward behaviour. The body quickly absorbs alcohol however, the exact time that the body will take to absorb alcohol will vary from one person to another.

There are many factors that affect BAC.

### Physical factors

**Gender:** females tend to have a slightly higher BAC than men after drinking the same amount because they have less body fluid to dilute the alcohol.

**Size:** smaller people are affected more than larger people for the same reason.

**Fitness level:** it may take longer for a fit person with more muscle tissue and less fat to be affected by alcohol, as lean muscle tissue contains around 65 per cent more water than body fat.

**Health:** being tired, ill or stressed may affect a person's reaction to alcohol. The central nervous system is under stress when a person is tired or ill. Alcohol is a depressant and places more stress on the body's systems, which may result in the person being more quickly affected by alcohol.

**Age:** as a person ages their total body water tends to decrease, so that a given amount of alcohol will produce a higher BAC.

### Other factors

**Psychological:** an unhappy or depressed state of mind may be increased when a person drinks alcohol. Two drinks when a person is depressed or unhappy may have the same effect as four drinks would normally have.

**Rate of drinking:** if a person drinks alcohol quickly it will have a greater effect because they are drinking at a faster rate than their body can remove it.

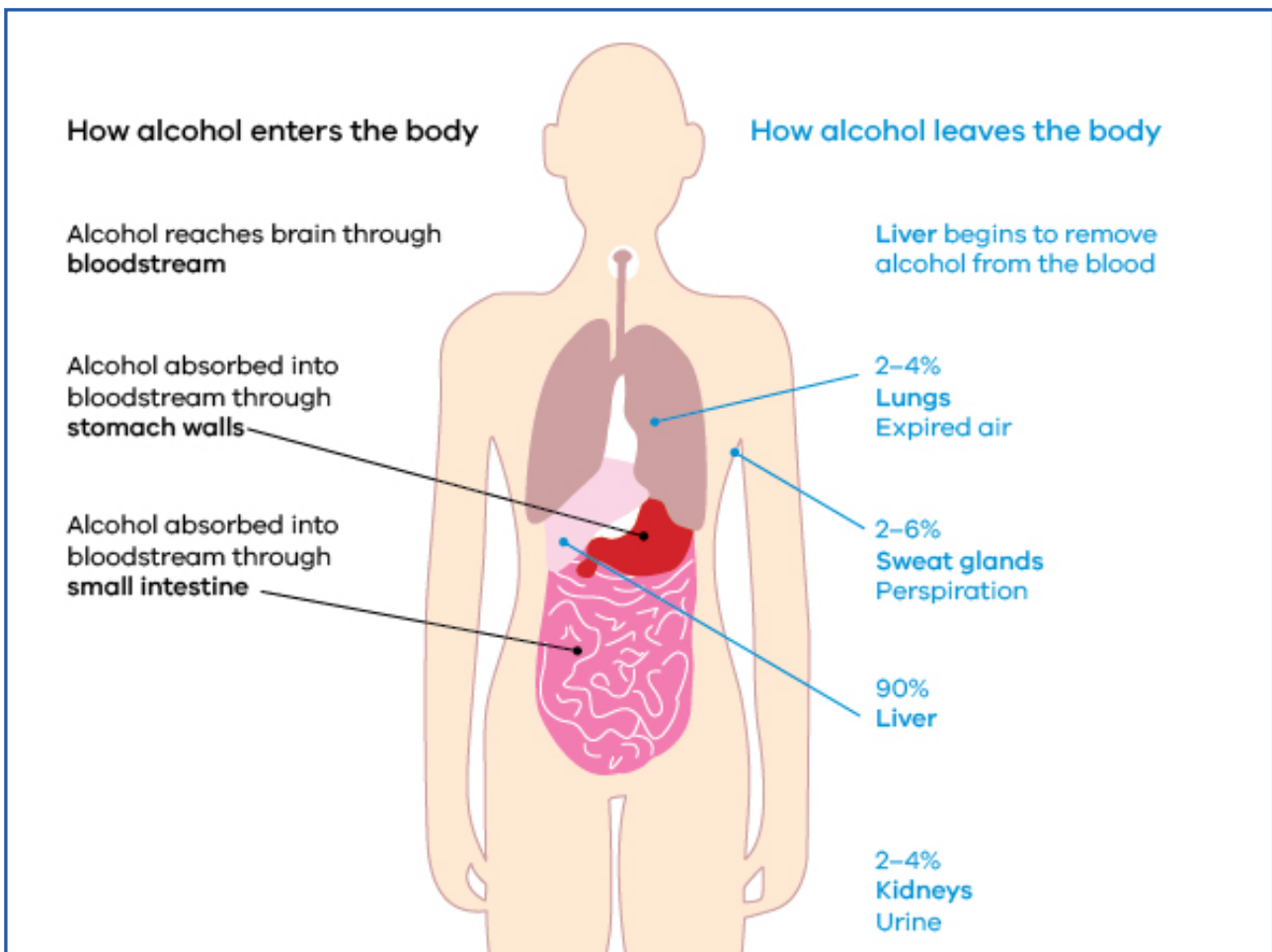
**Drinking on an empty stomach:** if there is food in the stomach, alcohol will mix with the food before passing to the small intestine. This slows down the alcohol being absorbed into the blood however, the process is only slowed down – not stopped. Eventually, all of the alcohol consumed will be absorbed into the blood and will travel around the body, but the BAC will not rise to the same levels as they would if the person had not eaten.

**Medication:** many medications will interact with alcohol. This increases the potential for loss of control of behaviour and can be dangerous.

Therefore, people should avoid drinking alcohol when taking medication.

**Illicit drugs:** mixing illicit drugs such as cannabis, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine or ecstasy, with alcohol can have dangerous or lethal consequences. People should avoid mixing alcohol and drugs.





## Sobering up

The liver is the main organ that removes alcohol from the bloodstream. As a general rule, a healthy liver removes alcohol at the rate of one standard drink per hour. This will vary according to size, gender and general health.

It is important to realise that sobering up takes time. Letting people become intoxicated and giving them an hour to sober up is not an effective strategy.

All the old stories such as:

- cold showers
- black coffee
- vomiting
- urinating

**DO NOT WORK!**

The best way to avoid intoxication is for individuals to 'pace' themselves – that is, drink at a rate no faster than the body can break down the alcohol.

If a person drinks regularly, they may become more tolerant to alcohol. They may have to drink more to get the same effect.

However, their BAC could be just as high as anyone else drinking the same amount. In fact, if their liver is not healthy, their BAC may be higher.

## Responsible consumption

To lessen health and safety risks, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends the following levels for safe consumption:

**For healthy men and women**, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury.

**For healthy men and women**, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.

**For young people under 15 years**, parents and carers should be advised that children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking. Not drinking alcohol at this age is especially important.

**For young people aged 15–17 years**, the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

**For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy**, not drinking is the safest option.

**For women who are breastfeeding**, not drinking is the safest option.

They also note that:

- drinkers under the age of 15 years are much more likely than older drinkers to undertake risky or anti-social behaviour connected with their drinking
- risky behaviour is more likely among drinkers aged 15–17 years than older drinkers; if drinking does occur in this age group, it should be at a low risk level and in a safe environment, supervised by adults
- alcohol may adversely affect brain development and lead to alcohol-related problems in later life.

### What is Blood Alcohol Concentration?

### Approximately 10 grams of pure alcohol are contained in how many mls of the following drinks?

Drink	mls
Beer	
Wine	
Spirits	
Port	

Drinking no more than \_\_\_\_\_ standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury.

# Intoxication

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Who is responsible?

Who is to blame if a customer becomes intoxicated?

Who is responsible if they cause harm to themselves or others?

## Is it the responsibility of:

- the manager?
- the barperson?
- the customer?

Once patrons have consumed alcohol to a level where they are showing signs of intoxication, their normal judgement is impaired. Therefore, it is up to the server, not the customer, to decide whether or not they should be served.

### Managers have a responsibility to:

### Staff have a responsibility to:

### Customers have a responsibility to:

## Why do we have a law that states a licensee cannot serve an intoxicated customer?

The government has a role in introducing legislation and regulation to protect the community and encourage appropriate alcohol use.

Intoxication is a contributing factor in many social problems:

- assaults
- family violence
- road deaths
- accidents and falls
- chronic illness.

This results in costs to the community for:

- our hospitals
- emergency departments
- city streets
- ambulances
- police stations
- homes of our families and friends.

It is an offence to supply liquor to a person in a state of intoxication. If a licensee is charged with supplying liquor to a person in a state of intoxication, it will be as a result of a judgement made about the behaviour of the customer by a police officer or a VCGLR inspector. This judgement will be made based upon obvious behavioural signs.

The VCGLR is required to issue guidelines containing information that assists in determining if a person is in a state of intoxication.

The VCGLR consulted with Victoria Police and industry bodies including the Australian Hotels Association and Community Clubs Victoria to ensure that guidelines are useful to licensees and easy to understand.

The Intoxication Guidelines can be viewed in full at [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au)

You can also access additional information on identifying intoxicated patrons, what to do if someone is intoxicated and ways of helping reduce the risk of intoxication.

### **Intoxication is defined in Section 3AB (1) of the Act:**

“A person is in a state of intoxication if his or her speech, balance, coordination or behaviour is noticeably affected and there are reasonable grounds for believing that this is the result of the consumption of liquor.”

Good management and effective standards are the keys to encouraging good customer behaviour.

Drinking behaviour depends on three different factors.

**The drink:** the amount and strength of alcohol

**The drinker:** the characteristics of the person drinking the alcohol and their state of mind and personal circumstances

**The environment:** the atmosphere and prevailing rules of the venue where the drinking is taking place.

Of the three options listed above, the manager and staff are in a position to control or influence the amount and type of drink served and, in particular, the environment.

Some important preventative factors are:

- high levels of cleanliness and repair
- regular removal of glasses, containers and litter
- adequate numbers of licensed crowd controllers
- adequate toilet facilities
- video camera surveillance
- a balance between the numbers of men and women attending the premises
- non-aggressive staff monitoring the door
- readily available food and non-alcoholic drinks
- well trained staff
- excellent customer service
- a variety of spaces and activities
- adequate seating arrangements
- good communication between staff
- lack of congestion, to avoid over-crowding.

In summary, premises that have high standards, are clean and tidy and can control the negative behaviour of their customers, are more likely to have a good atmosphere and prevent problems.

### **Liquor promotions and serving practices**

The way alcohol is promoted and sold influences the way customers consume alcohol and how they behave. If your business runs promotions that encourage alcohol abuse, don't be surprised if it attracts people who like to get drunk

Apply a common-sense approach to serving practices. There are a number of promotional serving practices that may fulfil the duty to serve alcohol responsibly.

The following practices may be acceptable under controlled conditions:

- 'happy hours' that have reasonable limits and controls
- promotions involving low alcohol drinks
- reduced pricing that does not encourage drinking quickly
- drink cards offering limited liquor.

Unacceptable serving practices include:

- 'laybacks', 'slammers', 'blasters', 'bombs' or similar
- reward schemes such as drink cards, or promotions, which encourage rapid consumption of liquor over a short period of time
- 'all you can drink' offers for a set price
- promotions such as 'drink until you drop'
- drinking games such as poker, roll the dice, 2-for-1 practices
- promotions linked to inappropriate activities such as bikini nights.

When a liquor licence is granted, the licensee agrees to obey the laws set out in the Act. Every licensee has a duty to serve alcohol within these legal requirements. Serving practices that result in drunkenness and alcohol abuse on licensed premises can result in action being taken against the licensee. The VCGLR or Victoria Police may take action seeking to vary, suspend or cancel the liquor licence.

The VCGLR may also give notice to ban a licensee from advertising or promoting the supply of liquor on licensed premises if it is likely to encourage irresponsible consumption or is not in the public interest.

Guidelines for responsible liquor advertising and promotions have been published and assist licensees and promoters to identify the standards and conduct expected of them when advertising or running liquor-related promotions. These guidelines not only outline the expected standards associated with responsible serving practices but also provide real-life examples of practices that are likely to attract a ban. The guidelines and a fact sheet are available at [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au)

### **Alarm bells**

There are many things that can alert you to the fact that people are planning to become intoxicated, including:

**Their drinking patterns:** how quickly are they ordering? For example, two people ordering four drinks at a time, or ordering a large round of shots.

**Their general demeanour:** what are they saying? How are they behaving?

**Why are they out?** Is it a buck's/ hen's night or a sporting club function?

**Where have they come from?** Is there a big event, such as the Melbourne Cup, where people will have already been drinking before arriving at your venue?

If you can anticipate that trouble might be coming, an early word when customers are still sober could avoid that trouble.

### **Signs of intoxication**

There are many noticeable signs that a person may display as they become intoxicated.

#### **How can you decide if a person is in a state of intoxication?**

You should consider whether the person is displaying one or more of the signs of intoxication which may include:

- becoming loud, boisterous
- becoming argumentative
- annoying other patrons and staff
- using offensive language
- spilling drinks
- fumbling and difficulty in picking up objects
- swaying
- difficulty walking straight
- bumping into furniture or customers
- rambling conversation
- loss of train of thought
- difficulty in paying attention
- not hearing or understanding what is being said
- drowsiness or dozing while sitting at a bar or table.

You should also consider whether this is the result of the consumption of liquor, by taking into account information such as:

- How much alcohol have you witnessed the person drink?
- Information about how much the person has had to drink
- Does the person smell of alcohol?

### **Conditions that exhibit similar symptoms and signs to intoxication**

Sometimes physical and mental disabilities exhibit some of the same signs and symptoms as alcohol intoxication. You should consider the possibility of the existence of any such conditions prior to refusing service on the basis that a person is intoxicated.

### **You only need to believe, on reasonable grounds, that a person is intoxicated**

Remember, there is no requirement for a person to actually be intoxicated. The law only requires that there be 'reasonable grounds' for the belief that the person is intoxicated as a result of alcohol consumption. It is all right if you refuse service to a person on the basis of this belief, even if you are wrong.

### **Reasonable grounds for belief**

Reasonable grounds for belief are what a reasonable person would believe in the given situation, taking into account the relevant knowledge, facts you have and the circumstances you are in.

A belief can be formed on the basis of observing the physical signs and symptoms, talking to the person and their friends, and then considering whether such symptoms could be the result of alcohol consumption or another condition.

# Strategies for responsible service

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The community has become more aware of the social problems that result from alcohol abuse.

## Strategies to prevent intoxication

Licensees should be aware that their premises would be more attractive, profitable and they may have lower staff turn-over if they avoid problems caused by intoxicated customers.

Staff will find that their work is more pleasant without the intoxicated customer.

It is the task of management to create a low risk environment by implementing policies around the prevention of intoxication and underage drinking and working with their staff to ensure that this occurs.

Some ways to prevent problems with intoxicated/underage customers are:

- avoiding inappropriate promotions
- adopting a house policy on serving strategies and the refusal of service
- having a plan to prevent intoxication
- training staff regularly
- providing safe transport alternatives
- having a plan to prevent underage drinking
- having communication plans in place.

Some effective strategies to prevent intoxication include the following:

**Promote low alcohol drinks:** Sales of low alcohol beer have increased over recent years. Under normal drinking conditions, it is difficult for customers to exceed .05 BAC when drinking low alcohol beer. Promoting low alcohol drinks could also provide a commercial opportunity for licensees. A licensee can sell increased amounts of low alcohol drinks at the same time as being socially responsible.

**Promote non-alcoholic drinks:** Many licensed premises have found non-alcoholic drinks can be sold if they are properly promoted. Staff are in the best position to promote non-alcoholic drinks.

**Offer water:** Provide free drinking water to customers upon request and serve water with drinks.

## Free water

Under the Act, licensees are required to provide suitable free drinking water to customers where alcohol is consumed on-site.

**Have food available:** Serving food helps prevent problems in two ways:

- It slows the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream.
- When customers are eating, they are likely to drink less.

Some establishments offer free snacks between mealtimes because customers who drop in after work are likely to have an empty stomach. In general, customers appreciate well priced, interesting snacks.

**Sales techniques** – Licensees may choose to reconsider bulk sales such as the use of jugs. They may also consider alternatives to happy hours. If a happy hour is the normal practice, then consider promoting light beer only.



Other strategies include:

- waiting for the patron to re-order and don't automatically fill up drinks
- slow service down – keep yourself busy attending to other patrons or cleaning
- point to the relevant sign outlining your responsibilities
- alert other staff
- talk to the patrons, gauge the level of intoxication.

## **Adopt a house policy**

Written policies and procedures are the best way of informing new staff about the rules of the business.

A house policy creates a framework for the operation of the business. The house policy lets staff know that the business is committed to:

- encouraging moderation
- not serving underage people
- minimising the possibility of drink driving.

After adopting a house policy, it will need to be promoted. Staff should have solid support from management to implement the policy. At all times the licensee should be seen as a role model for employees and lead by example.

## **Train staff**

The effective training of staff is essential. Staff will need to understand responsible service strategies if these strategies are to be successful. Ideally all staff should be included in training sessions, to ensure that there are consistent standards.

Management should:

- clearly state their expectations of staff
- give staff authority to make decisions
- consider how to support decisions made by their staff.

This can be achieved by having:

- a written house policy
- an incident report book
- review and debrief on incidents
- regular staff meetings.

Staff should know they have the backing of management. With this support, staff will be more comfortable implementing the strategy for the Responsible Service of Alcohol.

## **Recording incidents**

You should record all incidents for a variety of reasons, including to:

- use as a learning tool and to assist in communication between staff and management
- provide an accurate record for police, company or insurance purposes
- help prevent similar incidents from happening again.

The incident record should include the following:

- date
- time

- what happened
- who was involved
- how it was dealt with
- whether police were called.

You may also wish to record the names of any witnesses and their contact information.

## Safe transport options

Caution should be exercised when bar staff are aware that customers are planning to drive. Nobody wants to see one of their customers become a road statistic. A safe transport strategy may help prevent this and may include:

- staff offering to call a friend or family of a customer
- staff offering to call a taxi
- making a phone available along with the phone numbers of taxi companies
- where practical, offering a mini bus to transport customers home
- starting a Designated Driver Program (DDP).

The DDP aims to ensure that the person driving a group is safe to drive. Examples of how some DDPs work include:

- drivers registering with staff when they enter the premises
- providing drivers with a badge or marker so that bar staff can identify them
- free non-alcoholic drinks provided to registered drivers.

It is a good strategy to offer discounted food to the driver. This may encourage the drinkers in the group to order food at the same time. It will also increase food sales and decrease the chance of people drinking on an empty stomach.

DDPs are only a good idea if the group of people involved drink responsibly. It should not become an excuse for the non-drivers to become intoxicated once they know they have a ride home.

If a licensee implements a DDP they should publicise it. Having a DDP can not only bring in business, but also promotes the venue as being a responsible venue. This sends a message to the community that the licensee cares about customers.

## Drink spiking

There is increasing concern about the dangers of drink spiking on licensed premises. Be aware that drink and food spiking are a criminal offence with a two-year jail term.

Staff can help by:

- getting any affected person to a safe, quiet place and staying with them
- calling an ambulance if they become unconscious
- ensuring that the person who is assisting them home is indeed a friend.

Drink spiking is not necessarily placing illicit drugs into a drink. Extra un-requested alcohol is the most commonly used drug in drink spiking. For example, ordering drinks for people with extra shots of vodka. This has direct implications on the RSA.

Management should think of having a policy about the number of standard drinks they will serve in any one glass. Some venues have a two standard drinks policy and will serve no more than two shots in any one drink. If they receive a request for cocktails with more than two alcoholic ingredients, they are poured in half shots.

Any request for drinks with extra shots of spirits added should be viewed with suspicion. Staff should look after people who suddenly appear intoxicated without warning and scrutinise any person offering to assist them home.

## Prevent drink spiking

The best way to prevent drink spiking is to follow RSA principles, and to:

- remove unattended glasses
- report suspicious behaviour
- do not sell or promote alcohol in a way that leads to rapid consumption
- be aware of unusual requests, such as beer with a shot of vodka
- decline a customer request to add alcohol to a person's drink.

### List five strategies to prevent intoxication:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

The penalty for supplying liquor to an intoxicated person or allowing a drunk person on the premises exceeds: \_\_\_\_\_

# Refusal of service

Even when management and bar staff do their best, some customers may still become intoxicated. Do not serve a customer who comes to licensed premises intoxicated. When you notice that a customer has become intoxicated, stop serving them. Management also has a legal duty to remove drunk people from the premises.

The continued service of alcohol to intoxicated customers is an important factor in the association between licensed venues and alcohol-related harm such as violence, drink-driving and injury.

## Be alert

Monitor the alcohol consumption of customers or groups of customers. This can be useful in heading off problems. Minor issues, not dealt with, become major issues.

The following are some factors that need to be monitored:

- What type of drinks are being ordered?
- Who is doing the ordering?
- How fast are they drinking?
- Is food being eaten?
- Is everyone at the table drinking?
- Are there people on the table who could give you support?

Remember that it may take up to 30 minutes for alcohol to have an effect. If the customer is already intoxicated, another 30 minutes might find them in a bad state.

## T-A-K-E C-A-R-E

Refusing service should be done respectfully and professionally. The perfect refusal should not be noticed by other customers. If not handled with sensitivity and tact it can end up creating conflict.

The following T-A-K-E C-A-R-E steps can help avoid difficult situations:

**T**ell early

**A**void put downs

**K**eep calm

**E**ver courteous

**C**larify refusal

**A**lternatives

**R**eport

**E**cho

**Tell early:** If the situation has been monitored properly, and the early signs of intoxication recognised, then this is the time to act. Slowing service, suggesting food, or a quiet word of warning can stop problems escalating. It might be useful to use other, more sober, members of a group to warn the intoxicated person.

**Avoid put-downs:** Don't be judgemental. Don't say things like "you're drunk" or "you've had too much to drink". Don't scold the customer, try to agree with them where possible "I agree you're not drunk, if you were, I'd have to ask you to leave and I'm trying to prevent that".

**Keep calm:** Your tone of voice is very important. You need to have a firm voice without being aggressive. Do not raise your voice. Behaviour breeds behaviour. You can calm them down if you remain calm yourself.

**Ever courteous:** Customer service demands that staff respect their customers. Be polite. Tell it from your point of view:

- “I’m sorry, if I served you another drink, I’d be breaking the law”
- “I’m sorry, if I served you another drink, I could lose my job”
- “I’m concerned about your safety”.

**Clarify refusal:** Explain why service is being refused. Remember to focus on the behaviour, not the individual. Sometimes a customer may think they are being barred from the premises. Explain that they are welcome back tomorrow, if they behave.

**Alternatives:** Offer them a way to back out with their dignity intact.

A warning that this will be the last drink for a while may allow them to ‘save face’ in front of their friends or offering to call a taxi. Switch customers to low or non-alcoholic drinks may also be an alternative.

**Report:** Make sure that other staff and other shifts are aware of what has happened. Keep an incident logbook near the bar and write down what has occurred. If the customer injures themselves, or a third party, after leaving the premises, the record may assist in a defence against civil action.

**Echo:** If the customer is a regular, staff can quietly reinforce the message when they return. They will usually be in a more receptive state to hear and understand why the action was taken. The customer may even thank staff for looking after them.

## Body language

Understanding body language can be very helpful in seeing trouble and dealing with it effectively. The table below shows the signs to look out for if someone is getting aggressive. You also need to think about your own body language. When dealing with the situation, you need to be assertive if you want people to do as you say, not aggressive or passive.

	Aggressive	Assertive	Passive
Posture	Leaning forward	Upright/straight	Shrinking
Head	Chin jutting out	Firm, not rigid	Head down
Eyes	Staring, piercing or glaring eye contact	Good, regular eye contact	Glancing away, minimal eye contact
Face	Set or firm	Expression fits the words	Smiling even when upset
Voice	Loud and emphatic	Calm, clear and controlled	Soft, trailing off at end of sentences
Arms	Hands on hips, fists, pointing, jabbing	Relaxed/moving easily, open palms	Slow and hesitant or fast and jerky
Movement/ Walking	Slow and pounding or fast, deliberate	Measured pace suited to situation	Slow and hesitant or fast and jerky

It's not easy to get it right, but don't give up. If you think carefully about your voice, your body language and being calm, everything else tends to follow.

## Distance

Each person has a certain amount of 'personal space'. If a stranger stands too close, it is uncomfortable. In conflict situations, standing too close may be seen as a threat, so keep a comfortable distance from the person you're speaking to and never touch the customer.

A barrier of some kind, such as a table, can help to keep this distance. The bar or counter itself is a barrier. You may have found that you feel more comfortable speaking with people when you are behind the bar or counter than when you are out on your own. This is because the physical barrier acts as a psychological barrier as well.

It may not be appropriate for you to refuse service until you have built up some experience. Talk to your supervisor about how they want you to handle these situations.

If customers are angry, try to calm them down by speaking calmly and quietly. If people or property are threatened, it may be necessary to call the police. Keep your colleagues informed, and the manager will make the appropriate decision.

Remember, if the customer is intoxicated, their brain will be affected by the alcohol, making them less inhibited, quicker to anger and more likely to say or do things they wouldn't normally do. They may also have more difficulty in understanding you. It is especially important to speak clearly and slowly – you may have to repeat yourself several times, so try not to get angry or impatient.

# Underage

Significant research has been carried out on the effects of alcohol on the developing brain. This research suggests that the brain does not fully develop until age 24 for males and 22 for females and that alcohol intake can severely impact on brain development during this time.

The legal drinking age is set because alcohol can be very dangerous to young people. This is because they generally lack the experience of dealing with alcohol and their internal organs have not finished developing, so a small amount may have a much larger effect than it does on adults.

Studies have shown that those who first became drunk by the age of 19 are more likely to be alcohol dependent and heavy drinkers later in life. The safest option is to delay the first alcoholic drink for as long as possible.

A plan is needed to prevent the illegal supply of liquor to people under 18 years of age (minors). There are heavy penalties for licensees and staff who illegally:

- allow minors on licensed premises
- permit liquor to be supplied to minors
- permit a minor to supply liquor.

## Minors on licensed premises

A minor can be on licensed premises if:

- they are in the company of a responsible adult
- they are partaking in a meal
- they are residing on the premises
- they are employed in duties other than the supply of liquor
- they are engaged in a training program in hospitality or work experience
- the premises has an on-premises licence with restaurant conditions or a restaurant and cafe licence and it is prior to 11pm
- they are employed to deliver packaged liquor to a person over 18 years of age for consumption off the licensed premises
- live music events, where sound is created or manipulated for artistic, cultural or religious purposes, and performed to an audience (alcohol free event)
- other underage or mixed aged events which don't involve live music (alcohol free event)
- they have approval from the VCGLR and subject to any conditions of that approval.

## Minors can't drink on licensed premises

Minors are not allowed to drink liquor on licensed premises under any circumstances.

## Minors supplying liquor on licensed premises

The only circumstance where a licensee can permit a minor to supply liquor is if they are:

- engaged in a training program that has the written approval of the VCGLR, and
- in keeping with any conditions the VCGLR has set down.

These conditions will always include that minors must be closely supervised when they serve alcohol. A minor can be employed to deliver packaged liquor to a person over 18 years of age. For example, a junior working in a supermarket can carry drinks to a customer's car.

An adult must not send a minor to obtain liquor on their behalf. An adult cannot purchase liquor for minors. More information is available at [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au)

## Evidence of age

Acceptable evidence of age documents are:

- an Australian driver's licence
- an Australian or foreign passport
- a 'Proof of Age' card or equivalent from another state of Australia
- a Victorian learner permit
- a Keypass card
- Keypass in Digital iD.



### Maximum penalties for the following breaches of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* are:

Breach	Section of the Act	Maximum penalty \$
Minor is on licensed premises (other than a restaurant) unaccompanied.	s.123(1)(c)	
Server illegally supplies liquor to someone under 18 years of age.	s.119(4)	
Licensee illegally allows person under 18 years of age to supply liquor.	s.122(1)	
Licensee illegally supplies liquor to someone under 18 years of age.	s.119(1)(a)	
Licensee supplies liquor to an intoxicated customer.	s.108(4)(a)	
A person illegally purchases liquor for minors.	s.119(3)	



**List six circumstances in which minors are allowed to remain on licensed premises:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

## Strategies to prevent underage drinking

**Monitor your door:** Many venues have staff at the door to ensure underage people are not admitted. This allows staff to avoid trouble early. Monitoring the door also allows staff to refuse entry to intoxicated persons.

**Check ID:** Staff should request identification if there is any doubt about the age of the customer. Some licensees have found it useful to check ID for all customers who look to be under 25 years of age.

Drink waiters and 'glassies' that walk around the floor area of venues can potentially identify underage drinkers who are not going to the bar to order.

Some common methods to fake IDs are:

- using another person's ID
- applying transparent film that provides different particulars
- altering the date of birth.

When checking a person's ID:

- check for the consistency of holograms
- pay close attention to their physical features such as their nose, freckles, etc.
- carefully check the date of birth for liquid paper, tampering or scratching
- ask them their birth date or star sign.

False ID (other than a driver licence) can be taken from underage drinkers. The licensee must pass the false ID onto the police for follow up.

**List two strategies to prevent underage drinking:**

- 1.
- 2.

# Packaged liquor

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Selling packaged liquor creates its own unique challenges for responsible service of alcohol. Unlike a hotel or club, the person working in a packaged liquor store does not have the benefit of seeing a situation develop and taking early steps to prevent a problem from arising. In a packaged liquor store the problem may start when a customer walks in the front door and has to be dealt with almost immediately.

It is important for a packaged liquor licensee to have their house in order to combat the unique challenges that they face. This means having:

- the required signage displayed
- staff selling liquor who are over 18 years of age and who have been trained
- standard operating procedures in place for dealing with difficult situations.

**Employees:** A licensee must not allow minors to supply liquor however, a minor can be employed to deliver packaged liquor to a person over 18 years of age for consumption off the licensed premises. What this means is that a person under 18 years of age can carry drinks to a customer's car but is not allowed to take orders or money for liquor.

All managers and staff involved in the service of liquor must undertake RSA training and refresh their knowledge every three years.

**Secondary supply:** Liquor cannot be sold legally to a minor.

In addition, where there are reasonable grounds for considering that an adult is purchasing alcohol for a minor, the sale must be declined. Examples of this might be:

- minors in a store accompanied by an 18-year-old who is making a large purchase
- parents purchasing liquor for a child who is obviously under 18
- you decline to serve some minors and a short time later an adult enters your store and makes the same order the minors made
- you see a group of minors hanging around in front of the store, and then an adult enters and makes a large order of various drinks popular with young people.

**Checking ID:** ID should be requested if there is any doubt about the age of the customer. It is good practice to check ID for all customers who look to be under 25 years of age.

**Intoxication:** The same laws previously discussed exist for packaged liquor licences and alcohol cannot be sold to a person in a state of intoxication.

**Code of Conduct:** It is a condition of all packaged liquor licences that they comply with the Packaged Liquor Code of Conduct. It is important that people running packaged liquor stores read this information available online at [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au)

# Functions

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Topping up of glasses without request makes it difficult for customers to monitor how much they have had to drink.

## Booking the function

When taking a booking for a function, it is important to clearly communicate to the client what your responsibilities are as liquor licence holders.

Everyone is actively encouraged to have a written policy on the responsible service of alcohol.

It will assist your staff in clearly understanding what you require of them and allow that information to be conveyed to the customer.

Once developed, communicating the policy to clients then becomes paramount. Information can be placed into booking forms and promotional materials. Websites are also a good place to publicise the policy. Consider how long the function will go for and when liquor will be provided, particularly pre-dinner drinks when people may be drinking on an empty stomach. As a guide, pre-dinner drinks should be limited to 30 minutes and ideally, the function run for no more than five hours.

Have the host nominate a person that staff can approach if there is an issue with the service of alcohol. This may be the host or another person, if they consider they would be too busy to deal with these matters during the function.

With cocktail functions, you need to ensure that an appropriate quantity and style of food is agreed upon and when it will be served. The time the function is held will be important here. The needs of a 5pm to 7pm function can be very different from a 6pm to 10pm function.

## Prior to the function

What you do prior to the event can greatly influence how well things go during the function. Staff trained in RSA will be best placed to serve alcohol responsibly. They should also be aware of your RSA policy and know what procedures are in place should problems arise during the event. A service briefing before the function will help staff focus on their responsibilities and be aware of any particular issues.

## Function operations

Messages on menus or the use of 'tent cards' on tables can help promote the message of responsible drinking.

Topping up of glasses without request makes it difficult for customers to monitor how much they have had to drink and make good judgements, such as whether or not they should be driving.

Water provides an opportunity for customers to hydrate and take a rest from alcohol. Depending on the style of function, you might consider taking a tray of bottles of water around part way through the party, when people might be feeling like water but would not necessarily ask for one. With cocktail parties, trays of drinks should always contain soft drinks as well as alcoholic beverages.

At the end of the function, it may become apparent that some people may have over-indulged and would be a danger to themselves and others if driving. In this situation staff should offer to call a taxi for the customer.

## Underage

If it is an event where underage service might be an issue (for example, 18th birthday parties) it might be appropriate to organise colour-coded wrist bands to differentiate between those under and those over 18 years of age.

Pre-function confirmation paperwork forwarded to the host may include your RSA policy and, if necessary, a form for the host to advise of minors attending the function. This form could also advise that minors may be provided with a wrist band to alert wait staff that they are minors. The host could be required to sign this form with an understanding of the licensee's responsibility with regard to RSA and minors.

## Post function

A staff debrief can help reinforce standards and better address any difficulties that may have arisen. Any problems should be recorded in an incident register so that they can be addressed if the customer wants to re-book in the future. This may also be of assistance if the customer causes an injury to themselves or others after leaving and tries to put the blame on your business.

A model policy for the Responsible Service of Alcohol can be found at [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au)