



Guide for Inclusive Responsible and Successful Events

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The role of alcohol at social gatherings **is changing.**

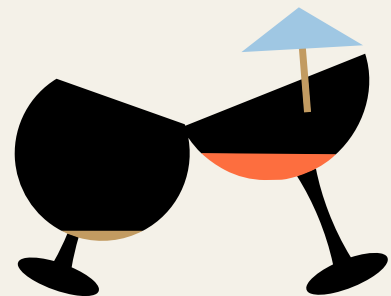
In Quebec, alcohol sales are trending downward, while non-alcoholic and low-alcohol options are becoming increasingly visible. Alcohol remains part of many social settings, but its presence can no longer be taken for granted: many people are choosing to drink less, not drink at all or make choices based on their health, values, culture, age, personal circumstances or plans for getting home.

Offering genuine drinking choices that are appealing and easy to access is therefore more than a logistical detail: it is a way to create a more inclusive, safer and more responsible event. The goal is not to eliminate alcohol from the menu, but to create an environment where every choice feels equally valid, without pressure to drink or the need to explain why.

How can we create and host gatherings where genuine non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beverage choices are available?

This guide provides practical guidance and solutions for reducing alcohol-related risks, supporting informed individual and collective choices, and ensuring that everyone can fully participate in an event, regardless of what they choose to drink.

Offering alcoholic, low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beverages with the same level of care is an inclusive and responsible approach. It aims to reduce automatic associations with alcohol and alcohol-related risks, and to help ensure that no one feels set apart because they drink less, do not drink or choose something else.



What does “low alcohol” mean?

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, these designations refer to distinct alcohol-content thresholds:

- **Alcohol-free:** less than 0.05% alcohol;
- **Dealcoholized:** less than 0.5% alcohol;
- **Low-alcohol:** less than 1.1% alcohol.

A changing framework

Alcohol consumption exists along a continuum of risk. Health risks increase with the amount consumed, and any reduction can be beneficial (“drinking less is better”).

Assortment of fresh cocktails
with and without alcohol
at the bar.



1

Setting the framework

Permits, insurance and responsibilities

Before confirming the event, check the required permits, insurance coverage, internal policies and responsibilities related to alcohol service, safety and getting attendees home safely.

Resources:

RACJ <https://www.racj.gouv.qc.ca/alcool/vendre-ou-servir-des-boissons-alcooliques-lors-dune-activite-occasionnelle>

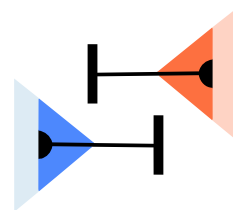
CNESST <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/fr/prevention-securite/identifier-corriger-risques/liste-informations-prevention/facultes-affaiblies-en-milieu-travail>



Service in Action Training

For beverage service, choose a team that has received responsible-service training or awareness training. Service in Action training, offered by ITHQ with the support of Éduc'alcool, is designed to equip service staff to recognize signs of intoxication, prevent risky situations and intervene tactfully.

Choosing the venue



Alternalcool^{MC}

Tip

Whenever possible, choose a service model or venue that places value on non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beverages.

- Choose a venue where it is easy to offer water, food and clearly visible non-alcoholic options, as well as places to rest and easy access to transportation or a safe-ride service.
- Also consider how people naturally move through the space: if the bar becomes the main gathering point, alcohol may end up shaping the overall event experience.

Bar service

- Plan a setup that makes the different beverage choices visible, appealing and easy to access. Non-alcoholic and low-alcohol options should be presented as genuine festive choices, not as alternatives or substitutes.
- Avoid open bars. Instead, opt for supervised service, measured portions and, where appropriate, a limited number of drink tickets. This approach helps normalize moderation without taking away from the celebratory atmosphere.

2

Starting with the invitation

Set the tone before the event

Clearly present

the non-alcoholic, low-alcohol and alcoholic beverage options, giving each comparable prominence in the menu and communications.

Use the registration

form to collect beverage preferences when this information is useful for planning quantities, just as you would for allergies or dietary restrictions.

Let attendees know

what safe transportation options are available.

Present Alternalcool^{MC}

as a positive, inclusive and fun choice.

Plan for a safe trip home

Remind attendees of the options available: designated driver who does not consume any alcohol, carpooling, public transit, taxi, ride-hailing app or safe-ride service.

Use the registration form to collect information about beverage preferences, with or without alcohol, just as you would ask about allergies or dietary restrictions, when this information is useful for planning quantities. Be careful not to require people to explain or justify these preferences, as doing so could reveal personal or sensitive information (pregnancy, medication use, etc.).

3

Reducing risks

The way an event space is arranged can have a significant impact on behaviour.

The bar should not be the only focal point or give the impression that alcohol is at the centre of the experience. Instead, make it a welcoming and inclusive space where water, non-alcoholic beverages and low-alcohol options are just as visible, thoughtfully presented and easy to choose as alcoholic beverages.

Food, water and pacing

Serve food as soon as guests arrive, keep water visible and accessible, and avoid letting alcohol service set the pace of the event.

Serve food as soon as guests arrive, keep water visible and accessible, and avoid letting alcohol service set the pace of the event. Eating before and while drinking can reduce peak blood alcohol concentration: by about 25% with a savoury snack (210 kcal) and about 68% with a full meal (635 kcal), compared with drinking on an empty stomach ([Fisher et coll., 2020](#)).



If beverages are being passed on trays, make sure the options offered to guests are comparable in quality, presentation and variety, regardless of whether they contain alcohol.

Make non-alcoholic beverages just as appealing and accessible as alcoholic beverages.

Combinations to avoid

Certain combinations can increase risks when consumed with alcohol, such as energy drinks, cannabis, other substances, certain medications, gambling, physical activities, driving and tasks that require alertness.



Some non-alcoholic beverages that reproduce the taste, appearance or presentation codes of alcohol may trigger cravings in some people with alcohol use disorder. To make the beverage offer truly inclusive, also provide drinks that do not resemble alcoholic beverages.

If people need to drive, supervise others, operate equipment or return to work after the event, they should not consume alcohol.

Pay attention to serving sizes

A standard drink contains 13.45 g of pure alcohol. This is approximately equivalent to:



341 ml of **beer, cider**, a **cooler** or another **ready-to-drink** beverage at 5% alcohol



142 ml of **wine** at 12% alcohol.



43 ml of **spirits** at 40% alcohol.

Regardless of the amount served, it is prohibited to sell, offer or serve alcoholic beverages to a minor. When in doubt, the service team must verify the person's age using valid identification before providing an alcoholic beverage.

4

Practical Tools



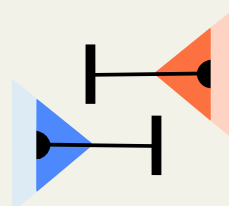
Standard Drink Pourer

For serving sizes and alcohol percentages.



Calcoholator

To estimate how blood alcohol concentration may change based on beverage type, serving size, alcohol content and timing. It should not be used to decide whether someone is fit to drive.



Alternalcool

Recipes and inspiration for offering appealing, festive non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beverages that are seamlessly integrated into the event experience.

Alternalcool establishments showcase inclusive, varied, and thoughtfully presented practices around these options.

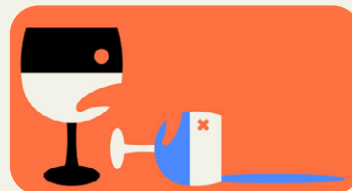
Tip

Make these resources available through a QR code displayed near the event entrance, washrooms, coat check or a water station. Include them in invitations and thank-you messages as well, so attendees can access them before, during and after the event.

Designate a go-to person

Designate one or more trained individuals who are clearly identifiable and available throughout the event to respond promptly to situations involving alcohol, safety or an attendee's well-being. These individuals should know whom to contact, understand the intervention procedures, be able to coordinate safe transportation when needed and respond calmly, discreetly and without judgment.

[Service in Action](#) training can help them recognize signs of intoxication, prevent risky situations and intervene appropriately.



If a person appears to be in distress

- **Notify the designated go-to person** for the event.
- **Intervene early**, discreetly and without judgment.
- **Offer water, food, a quiet place to rest and a safe way home.**
Food does not sober someone up; only time lowers blood alcohol concentration. However, eating before and while drinking can reduce peak blood alcohol concentration.
- **Try to find** out whether the person has taken any other substances.
- **Place the person on their side**, in the recovery position.
- **Do not leave someone** who is severely intoxicated or vulnerable alone.
- **Call 911** if someone is unconscious, breathing slowly or irregularly, vomiting and at risk of choking, has cold and clammy skin or is unresponsive. To help prepare your team to recognize alcohol poisoning and respond appropriately, consult the Public Health Agency of Canada's poster [Alcohol poisoning: Hey, are you ok?](#) which presents signs to watch for and steps to take.



Helping without fear of being sued

Section 1471 of the [Civil Code of Québec](#) protects a person who comes to someone's aid in a selfless manner. In general, that person is not liable for harm that may result from their intervention. This protection does not apply, however, if the harm results from intentional or gross fault. It is therefore important to act in good faith, with care and within one's abilities, while calling emergency services promptly when the situation requires it.



5

Wrapping up the event

- To help guests wind down and bring the event to a smooth close, reduce or stop alcohol service before the event ends.
- At this point, highlight water, food and non-alcoholic beverages.
- Remind guests of their transportation options, including public transit, taxis, ride-hailing apps, carpooling and safe-ride services.

28

Approximately how many minutes it takes to reach peak blood alcohol concentration on an empty stomach.

Alternalcohol recipes can provide inspiration for festive end-of-evening beverages.



6

Reviewing the event

After the event, include alcohol service and management in your overall review.

Thank-you message and resources to share

In your thank-you message, take the opportunity to highlight what went well at the event, such as a welcoming atmosphere, visible non-alcoholic and low-alcohol options, easy access to water, safe-ride planning or any other measures that helped people make responsible choices.

The message can also be used to share useful resources again, including Éduc'alcool tools, safe-ride options, contact information for support services if needed or a short feedback survey.

Ending on a positive note reinforces the behaviours you want to encourage and helps lay the groundwork for the next event.

Rethinking future gatherings

The review is also an opportunity to consider whether the next gathering should include alcohol service at all. Depending on the purpose of the activity, other formats may encourage conversation, recognition or team cohesion just as effectively. These might include a breakfast, cultural outing, creative workshop, walk, outdoor excursion, light physical activity, family event or discussion session. Varying the format can help engage a wider range of people, reduce automatic associations with alcohol and create shared experiences where participation does not depend on what people choose to drink.



Post-event review template

Use the template below in the days following the event to document observations, identify what worked well and make adjustments for future activities. The goal is not to single anyone out, but to better understand what helped support responsible choices, inclusion and safety.

Area to review

Questions to consider

Predicted and actual consumption

- Did the predicted quantities match actual consumption, including alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages?
- Were serving sizes measured accurately?

Most popular options

- Which non-alcoholic or low-alcohol beverages were most popular?
- Were they sufficiently visible, accessible and appealing?

Safe transportation

- Were there requests for taxis, carpooling, public transit or safe-ride services?
- Were these options easy to find and use?

Risky situations or interventions

- Did any situations require an intervention related to alcohol, safety or an attendee's well-being?
- Were procedures clear to the team?

Areas for improvement

- What should be maintained, changed or added to make the next event more inclusive, safer and more comfortable for everyone?

Event checklist

A checklist to use before, during and after an event to help ensure the conditions are in place for responsible, inclusive and safe choices.

Step

Action

Well before the event

- Check the applicable permits, insurance coverage, regulatory requirements and internal policies.
- Choose a venue that supports well-being and safety, with visible water stations, the option to serve food upon arrival, rest areas, accessible public transportation and a well-managed beverage service.
- Clarify responsibilities, including authorization to serve alcohol, service supervision, safety, incident management and safe transportation.
- Plan the beverage selection, including non-alcoholic, low-alcohol and alcoholic options. Make sure non-alcoholic options are festive, visible and well integrated into the overall experience.
- Avoid open bars, alcoholic shots and mixed drinks that make it difficult to gauge how much alcohol they contain.
- Estimate quantities, establish measured serving sizes, consider a drink-ticket system if appropriate and set service limits.
- Choose service staff who have received responsible-service training or awareness training. Consider offering [Service in Action](#) training where appropriate.
- Identify resources to share, including Éduc'alcool tools, support services, transportation options and emergency procedures.

Invitation and RSVP

- Clearly announce the alcoholic, low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beverage options.
- Use the registration form to collect preferences for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, just as you would for allergies or dietary restrictions, when this information is useful for planning quantities. Avoid requiring people to explain their preferences, as this could reveal personal or sensitive information, such as pregnancy, medication use, health concerns or recovery.
- Provide information about transportation options, including a designated driver who does not consume any alcohol, carpooling, public transit, taxis, ride-hailing apps and safe-ride services.
- Include a positive message that normalizes drinking less, not drinking or choosing a non-alcoholic option without having to explain why.
- Share Éduc'alcool resources to help guests plan their choices and transportation in advance and participate fully in the event.

Step

Action

In the weeks before the event

- Confirm serving-size guidelines, procedures for stopping alcohol service and protocols for responding to overconsumption with the venue or service team.
- Prepare menus, posters, QR codes and signage for display throughout the venue.
- Check that water, food, non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beverages, appropriate glassware and mocktail ingredients will be available.
- Confirm transportation and safe-ride options, including safe pick-up and drop-off areas.
- Designate a trained person who is clearly identifiable and available throughout the event to respond to any issue related to alcohol, safety or an attendee's well-being. Consider offering Service in Action training where appropriate.

During the event

- Serve food as soon as guests arrive and keep it accessible.
- Make water continuously available at several visible, accessible locations.
- Highlight non-alcoholic and low-alcohol options on menus, signage and through service.
- Set up the bar as a welcoming, inclusive space where non-alcoholic and low-alcohol options are just as visible and thoughtfully presented as alcoholic beverages.
- Measure serving sizes accurately.
- Intervene early, discreetly and without judgment if someone appears to be in distress.
- Display information about support resources and transportation options in visible but unobtrusive locations.

Step

Action

At the end of the event

- Reduce or stop alcohol service before the event ends.
- Make non-alcoholic and low-alcohol beverages, water and food readily available and highlight these options.
- Remind guests of their safe transportation options.
- Do not leave someone who is severely intoxicated or vulnerable alone.
- Call 911 if someone shows concerning signs, including unconsciousness, slow or irregular breathing, vomiting with a risk of choking, cold and clammy skin or unresponsiveness.

After the event

- Review the event, including planned and actual consumption, popular beverage options, requests for safe transportation, incidents, interventions and areas for improvement.
- Recognize what worked well from an organizational and logistical perspective.
- Send a thank-you message with useful resources and a short feedback survey.
- Adjust plans for the next event based on what you learned.



References

The recommendations in this guide are based in part on the following scientific, regulatory and institutional sources:

- 1 **Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.** [*Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report, 2023*](#). A synthesis of evidence on the continuum of alcohol-related risk, standard drinks and ways to reduce harms.
- 2 **Institut national de santé publique du Québec.** [*Effets sur la santé de l'alcool*](#), updated in 2026. Information on short- and long-term health effects, risk factors and interactions with other substances or medications.
- 3 **Caballeria, E., Pons-Cabrera, M. T., Balcells-Oliveró, M., et al.** "Doctor, Can I Drink an Alcohol-Free Beer? Low-Alcohol and Alcohol-Free Drinks in People with Heavy Drinking or Alcohol Use Disorders: Systematic Review of the Literature", *Nutrients*, 14(19), 3925, 2022.
- 4 **Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux.** [*Vendre ou servir des boissons alcooliques lors d'une activité occasionnelle*](#). Information on reunion permits and conditions for alcohol service.
- 5 **Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux.** [*Permis de réunion « pour vendre »*](#). Operating conditions, including the prohibition on selling or offering alcoholic beverages to minors or allowing minors to consume them.
- 6 **Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail.** [*Facultés affaiblies en milieu de travail*](#). Obligations and prevention measures when alcohol or other substances may compromise safety.
- 7 **Public Health Agency of Canada.** [*Alcohol poisoning: Hey, are you ok?*](#), poster updated in 2023. Signs of alcohol poisoning to recognize and emergency steps to take.
- 8 **Gouvernement of Québec.** [*Civil Code of Québec*](#), section 1471. Liability exemption for a person who comes to someone's aid, except in cases of intentional or gross fault.
- 9 **Fisher, J. M., Wolever, T. M. S., Campbell, J. E., Ezatagha, A., Noronha, J. C., and Jenkins, A. L.** "Effect of a sack bar optimized to reduce alcohol bioavailability: A randomized controlled clinical trial in healthy individuals" [*Journal of Medicinal Food*](#), 23(4), 432-439, 2020.

About Éduc'alcool

Éduc'alcool is an independent, non-profit organization that informs, educates and equips people across Quebec to help them develop a more responsible and informed relationship with alcohol.

Since 1989, the organization has developed educational content, practical tools, training programs and awareness campaigns to help people across Quebec better understand the effects of alcohol, assess their own consumption and make informed choices based on their circumstances, contexts and needs.

Éduc'alcool supports people in their everyday lives, workplaces, hospitality settings and at events by helping create more responsible, inclusive and safer environments, where drinking alcohol becomes a conscious choice rather than an automatic habit.



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Updated: October 2026.