



AGCO

Alcohol and Gaming
Commission of Ontario

Recognizing Intoxication

Licensee information sheets from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario

Although individual reactions to alcohol may vary, people follow certain general patterns as they approach intoxication.

These are the 10 main signs that indicate your customer is becoming drunk. These signs may appear in any sequence or be clustered, depending on the individual. As people become intoxicated, they will show more signs. Drinkers showing three signs can almost certainly be considered intoxicated.

Inappropriate speech volume: Drunks frequently speak in volumes inappropriate to the situation. They shout when it isn't necessary, whisper when there's no need for secrecy. The voice may go from low to high (or vice versa) when there is no reason to suggest that a change in volume is necessary.

Motor control (fine) deteriorates: As people become drunk, their skills requiring fine motor control (hand-eye coordination) deteriorate. Intoxicated patrons may fumble with their cell phones or have difficulty picking up change. As their coordination declines, people also misjudge distances. They may set a drink down hard on a table, thinking that the table is lower than it is.

Pace of speech: Intoxicated people may change the rate of their speaking, alternating racing speech with slow speech, or talking consistently slow or fast.

Alertness decreases: Intoxicated people take longer to respond to questions or react to events. They may not be able to understand or pay attention to what you're saying. They easily become muddled, and you have to repeat simple questions or requests before they respond.

Inappropriate sweating: Intoxicated people may sweat more than might be considered normal given the surrounding temperature, conditions or situation.

Red eyes: Take note if a customer's eyes are bloodshot to any degree.

Motor control (gross) deteriorates: Alcohol also impairs skills requiring gross motor coordination. Drunk customers may have difficulty standing upright or walking a straight line. They weave, misstep or stumble, perhaps bumping into other people or furniture. To compensate, they may put their hands out at the sides for support or balance.

Poor enunciation, slurring words: Alcohol relaxes muscles, including those in the mouth, making it hard to speak clearly and distinctly. An intoxicated person may make a single error — repeatedly stumbling over one word — or slur several words together. This is a very good sign someone is impaired.

Noticeably shallow breathing: Can you notice a difference between your breathing and the customer's? An intoxicated person may breathe noticeably slower or shallower than others. There may be weakness in breath, with little air inhaled or exhaled.

Tiredness: Alcohol is a depressant. As people become intoxicated, they show signs of being tired or sleepy. Their eyes may be heavy or closed, or they may have a placid or fixed gaze.

Dealing with intoxicated patrons

Here are some strategies to deal with customers who show signs of intoxication:

1 sign

- Become alert for the development of other signs (a single sign is not necessarily linked to intoxication).
- Make "low-risk" options available to slow alcohol intake. For example, offer food or low-alcohol drinks.

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2 signs

- Monitor the patron carefully.
- Move to low-alcohol or non-alcohol drinks.
- If possible, serve food to decrease the rate of drinking.

3 or more signs

- Serve no more alcohol to this patron under any circumstances.
- Use “management of intoxication” techniques to reduce the likelihood of injury and damage. For example, ensure that the patron has safe transportation home; if necessary, call the police.

Preventing intoxication

Obviously, if you focus your efforts on preventing intoxication, you won't have to be as concerned about recognizing intoxication.

These strategies may help you lower the risk of customer intoxication:

Alternative beverages:

Actively market non-alcoholic and low-alcohol drinks to your customers. Create interesting “mocktails” made without alcohol. Exotic names and fresh ingredients will make these products appealing to your customers.

Promote alternative beverages by offering them at prices that are competitive with regular alcoholic products.

Offer a wide variety of low and no-alcohol products and make sure your customers know these products are available. Advertise them on your menus and tent cards.

Food:

Serving food is one of the best ways you can lower your risk of customers becoming intoxicated. Not only does food delay the absorption of alcohol into the blood, but it generally takes customers longer to drink a round when they are also eating.

Offer free or low-priced appetizers for after-work customers. These people may be at especially high risk of becoming intoxicated because they are likely to have empty stomachs.

Try a “hungry hour” promotion with two-for-one snacks.

Train your servers to market food. Offer them incentives for increasing food sales.

Interview and assess:

Chat with your customers before taking their order. Have they eaten? Have they been drinking elsewhere? Clearly, people who have been drinking must be treated differently from those who have had nothing to drink. You have to decide whether or not to serve them even one drink, and monitor them for emerging signs of intoxication.

Don't invite trouble in:

Train your door staff to recognize the signs of intoxication and refuse entry to anyone who has had too much to drink.

House policy:

Develop, post and enforce a house policy on intoxication. You might print the policy on your menu or on tent cards with a list of your non-alcoholic drink specials.

All managers, licensed security personnel and employees handling liquor must be certified in an AGCO approved server training course. For more information on training for servers, please refer to the AGCO website at www.agco.on.ca