



# RECOGNIZING INTOXICATION

## INFORMATION SHEET FROM THE ALCOHOL AND GAMING COMMISSION OF ONTARIO



Although individual reactions to alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs may vary, people tend to follow certain patterns as they approach intoxication. This tip sheet outlines the main signs that indicate your customer may be starting to show the signs of intoxication from alcohol, cannabis, other

substances, or a combination of all. Patrons should be monitored over time as these signs may appear in any sequence or be clustered, depending on the individual. It is important to note that it is against the law for a person to smoke or vape cannabis in enclosed public places or work places, and other smoke free places. This includes establishments licensed by the AGCO.

### **Inappropriate speech volume:**

People who are showing signs of intoxication 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:**

People who are showing signs of intoxication have trouble performing skills requiring fine motor control (hand-eye coordination). Intoxicated patrons may fumble with everyday items such as papers, cell phones, or have difficulty picking up change. As their coordination declines, people also misjudge distances. They may have issues with their depth perception.

### **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:**

People who are showing signs of intoxication 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 may easily become muddled requiring you to repeat simple questions or requests before they respond.

**Inappropriate sweating:**

People who are showing signs of intoxication 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. Individuals intoxicated by cannabis may also exhibit eyelid tremors and dilated pupils.

**Motor control (gross) deteriorates:**

Alcohol and/or cannabis also impairs skills requiring gross motor coordination. Patrons showing signs of intoxication may have difficulty standing upright or walking a straight line. They may have a delay in response or in processing, 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 and cannabis have the ability to relax muscles, including those in the mouth, making it hard to speak clearly and distinctly. A person showing signs of intoxication may make a single error — repeatedly stumbling over one word — or slur several words together.

**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 and cannabis are depressants. 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.

## STRATEGIES FOR 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.

**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.
- Remember your obligation not to permit drunkenness or riotous, quarrelsome, violent or disorderly conduct to occur on the licensed premises or in the areas under your control.

## PREVENTING 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 by alcohol. Not only does food delay the absorption of alcohol into the blood, but it generally takes customers longer to drink 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 or consuming cannabis earlier? It is your responsibility not to permit intoxication in your licensed premises. You make the decision whether to serve patrons and bear the responsibility to monitor them for the signs of intoxication.

### **Don't invite trouble in:**

Train your door staff to recognize the signs of intoxication and refuse entry to anyone who appears intoxicated.

### **House policy:**

Develop, post and enforce a house policy on intoxication. It is important to note that the licensee is responsible for ensuring that all managers and persons involved in the sale or service of liquor have successfully completed a server training course (i.e Smart Serve). Furthermore, licensees are responsible for ensuring that patrons are not served to

intoxication or permit drunkenness in an establishment.

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.ca](http://www.agco.ca)

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For more information, please contact AGCO Customer Service at 416-326-8700 or 1-800-522-2876 (toll-free in Ontario) or visit us online at [www.agco.ca](http://www.agco.ca).