

## **Thousands more teenage girls hospitalised by binge-drinking than boys**

Teenage girls are more likely to end up in hospital because of binge-drinking than boys, ministers have warned.

By Rowena Mason, Political Correspondent

Figures from the Department of Health show girls are being admitted to hospital due to alcohol at a rate of around 550 per month, compared with boys at a rate of 450 per month this year.

The revelation that girls are suffering more from the effects of alcohol comes as the Prime Minister is planning to put a minimum price on drink.

The Daily Telegraph revealed yesterday that David Cameron favours measures to stop the sale of alcohol at below 40p to 50p a unit in English shops and supermarkets.

The figures for the past two years suggest around 2,400 more girls than boys have been seen by hospitals because of alcohol since the beginning of 2010.

Almost 8,000 children went to hospital with alcohol-related problems in the first eight months of this year alone, according to data published by Anne Milton, the public health minister.

Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, adviser to the Royal College of Physicians said it was "enormously encouraging the Prime Minister is listening to the evidence about price".

"Up until now coalition has been remarkably resistant to the evidence," he said. "A minimum price per unit we think is the fairest way as it doesn't affect the price of a beer in a pub or wine in restaurant but it really tackles cheap heavily discounted drinks."

He added that the problem of excessive drinking among young people is "accelerating more in girls than boys and girls are very much catching up boys in the health impacts of heavy binge drinking".

Yesterday, a leading liver expert said extra taxation was the "one single effective deterrent", as he warned that the biggest increase in alcohol-related health problems was in the young female population.

Dr Paul Southern, a consultant hepatologist at Bradford's Royal Infirmary, said people are now dying in their 20s from liver disease and binge-drinking children as young as 12 are falling prey to the "pocket money alcohol business".

"It is an absolute battle out there and I think I agree there is only one single effective deterrent and that is taxation," he said.

However, Downing Street's decision to support minimum pricing has split ministers. Theresa May, the Home Secretary, is said to favour taxing drink on the basis of alcoholic unit, while the Business Department has warned that forcing firms to charge a minimum price could be illegal under European law.

Andrew Lansley, the Health Secretary, favours a voluntary approach, but he has been overruled by Mr Cameron.

The Prime Minister could also face a battle with some of his backbenchers, who yesterday warned that the plans risks turning England into a "nanny state".

Christopher Chope, a Conservative MP, said the Government should not be trying to "interfere in a perfectly legal activity".

"I don't think it will actually sort out problem drinking at all," he said. "The Government shouldn't be trying to say some consumption is good and some is bad. It's another example of a Big Brother policy."

Many backbench Conservatives are already restless over Britain's membership of the European Union and high petrol taxes.

The price of alcohol could now become a similar issue to smoking in public places. Around 80 Conservatives recently voted in favour of weakening the ban over the belief that it encroaches on personal freedoms.