Alcohol is the third leading cause of disease and injury worldwide, even though the majority of adults do not drink, a new study concludes.

Just over 40 percent of the world's adult population consumes alcohol, said researchers at the Center for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Canada.

They noted alcohol causes liver cirrhosis and leads to traffic accidents, and has also been linked to several types of cancer, including female breast cancer. "Alcohol consumption has been found to cause more than 200 different diseases and injuries," lead author Kevin Shield noted in a news release. Only high blood pressure and tobacco smoking caused more disease and injury, the study found.

The researchers discovered wide regional variations in drinking patterns, MedicalXpress reports. For instance, drinkers in Europe and parts of sub-Saharan Africa consume the most alcohol, on average. People in southern sub-Saharan Africa frequently drink large quantities, drink until they become intoxicated, engage in prolonged binges, and drink mainly outside of meals.

Drinking is lightest in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, the study found. North Americans drink more than 50 percent above the worldwide average, and binge drink more than people in Europe.

Almost 30 percent of alcohol consumed in 2005 was "unrecorded," meaning it was not meant for consumption, was home-brewed, or illegally produced. "The amount of unrecorded alcohol consumed is a particular problem, as its consumption is not impacted by public health alcohol policies, such as taxation, which can moderate consumption," co-author Dr. Jürgen Rehm said.

The study appears in the journal *Addiction*.

To gain additional Understanding of Alcohol and Alcoholism, click here.