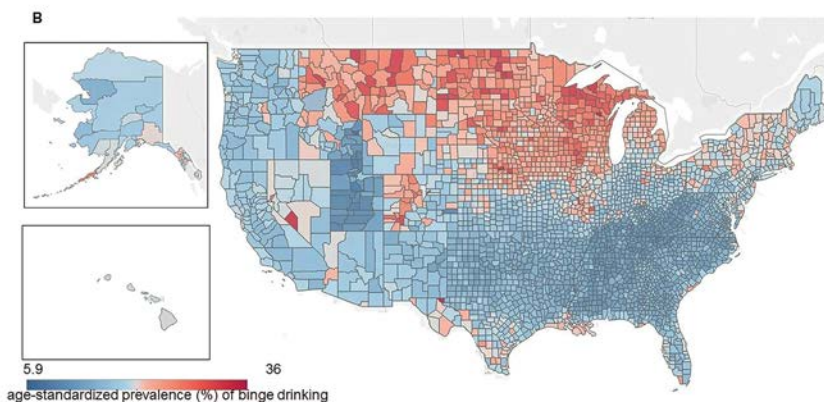
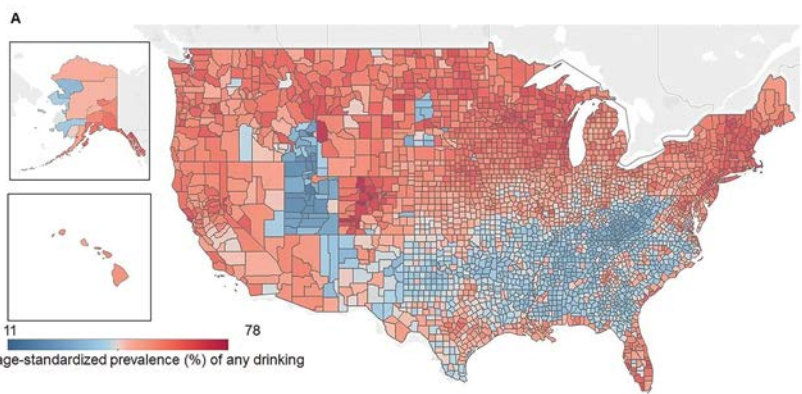
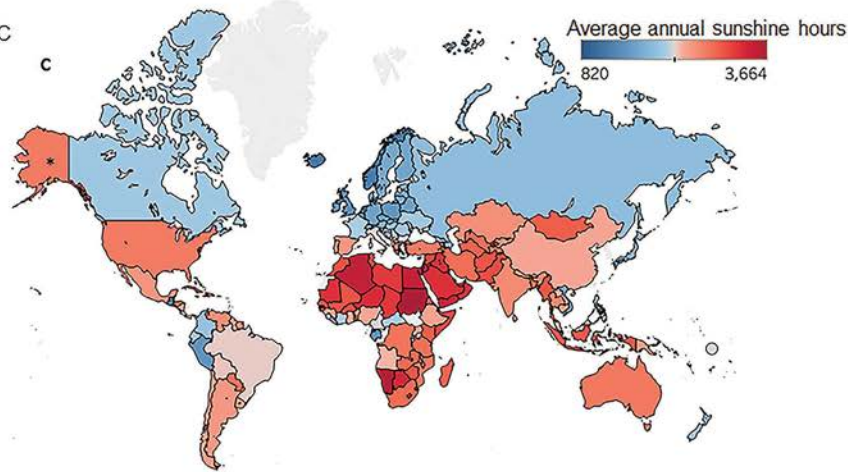
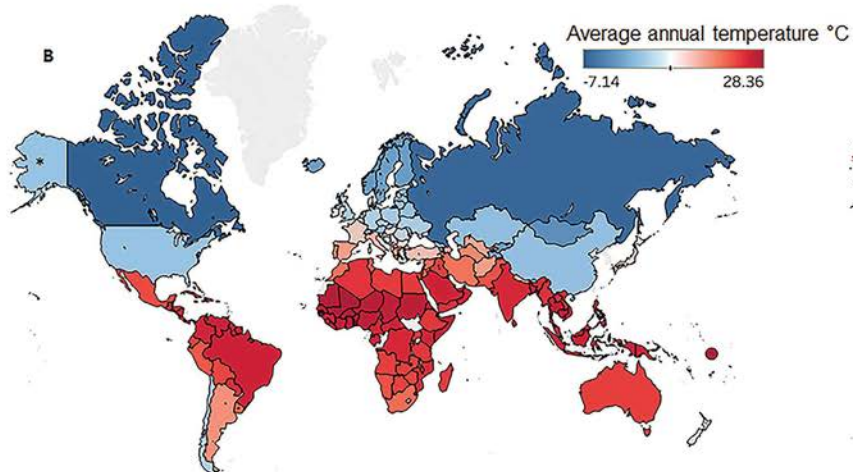


The global maps here show, by country, liters of annual alcohol intake per capita, average annual temperature, and average annual sunshine hours. (The researchers controlled for areas where more than 50 percent of the population belongs to a nondrinking religion, like Islam.) The U.S. maps show, by county, the percentage of people who drink or binge drink.

Source: Ventura Cots et al. (2018). *Hepatology*, doi: 10.1002/hep.30315. © John Wiley and Sons.



JIM BEAM AND JACK FROST ... ARE BETTER FRIENDS THAN YOU THINK

At 5 p.m. you leave work, and the sky is already as black as your Honda's snow tires. Crossing the parking lot, you shuffle across patches of ice and tighten a scarf that's losing its battle with the wind. Inside the car, you blow on cupped hands while the engine roars, and you think, *Some bourbon would warm me right up.*

If you can relate to that, you're not alone. People living in regions with lower temperatures and less sunlight consume more alcohol, according to Ramon Bataller, MD/PhD associate director of the Pittsburgh Liver Research Center and a professor of medicine at Pitt. (Bataller is from sunny Valencia, Spain.)

For years, Bataller, who also serves as chief of hepatology at UPMC, had suspected that people residing in cold, grayer regions drink more alcohol than those who live along the equator. To determine whether his hypothesis was correct, Bataller and his team gathered figures on average sunshine, temperature, and alcohol consumption, as well as cases of cirrhosis, from 193 countries and all 50 states. Stretching from the dry heat of America's Southwest to snow-capped Eastern European cities, global and national trends show that cold and cloudy skies correlate with increased alcohol intake and cirrhosis.

The reasons probably vary, according to Bataller. Drinking alcohol in the cold can create temporary sensations of warmth. Low light can also contribute to depression, he says, and increase alcohol use.

Meritxell Ventura-Cots, the principal author of the study and a postdoctoral fellow in Bataller's lab, says while various factors, such as socioeconomic status and religion, also contribute to individual alcohol intake, the research can help policymakers consider climate when targeting alcohol-related issues globally.

Bataller is investigating whether vitamin D, which we get from sunlight, can help prevent addiction and alcoholism. This may help him treat patients in Pittsburgh, where he's noticed high rates of alcoholism in youth.

—Prachi Patel