



Fact Sheet on Changes to Colorado Liquor Laws: For Consumers

Starting on January 1, 2019, consumers will now have the option to purchase full-strength beer at grocery and convenience stores in Colorado that previously sold 3.2% beer. The changes to state liquor laws in Colorado were part of an industry regulatory transformation approved by the state legislature in 2016 and expanded on with additional legislation passed in 2018.

The changes to the regulatory environment as a result of the 2016 and 2018 legislative actions are complex and impact a variety of activities concerning the manufacturing, selling and purchasing of fermented malt beverages. The Liquor Enforcement Division, the state agency responsible for overseeing and regulating the liquor industry across Colorado, has issued the following guide to answer the question of how these changes will impact consumers in Colorado.

History and Background:

During the 2016 legislative session, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill 16-197. On June 10, 2016, Gov. Hickenlooper signed Senate Bill 16-197 into law, concerning the retail sale of alcohol beverages. The signed bill restricts the issuance of new liquor-licensed drugstore and retail liquor store licenses except under specified circumstances; allows liquor-licensed drugstore and retail liquor store licensees to obtain additional licenses under limited circumstances; repeals the limit on the alcohol content of fermented malt beverages on January 1, 2019.

In 2018, the Colorado legislature passed a subsequent bill, Senate Bill 18-243, expanding the statutory changes from Senate Bill 16-197. On June 4, 2018, Gov. Hickenlooper signed Senate Bill 18-243 into law, which changed and added laws for several liquor license types in Colorado. Specific statutory changes took place immediately after the bill signing and others are effective beginning in 2019.

Effective January 1, 2019, the limitation on the maximum alcohol content of fermented malt beverages, also referred to as "3.2% beer", is eliminated, thereby allowing grocery stores, convenience stores, and any other person currently licensed or licensed in the future to sell fermented malt beverages for consumption on or off the licensed premises to sell fermented malt beverages containing more than 3.2% alcohol by weight or 4% alcohol by volume.



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What this means for Consumers:

- Starting on January 1, 2019, consumers will be able to purchase full-strength beer sold at retail locations that previously sold only 3.2% beer.
- Consumers can purchase full-strength beer at grocery and convenience stores beginning at 8 AM on January 1, 2019.
- Wholesalers and manufacturers cannot deliver full-strength beer to grocery stores until after midnight on December 31, 2018; consumers may see empty shelves and areas in stores before New Year's Day as retailers prepare for the change.
- Where you can purchase wine, sake, malt liquor and spirits has not changed. Changes to liquor laws only impact beer sales. Malt, vinous or spirituous liquor beverages may be purchased at licensed retail liquor stores or Liquor-Licensed Drugstores (grocery and convenience stores with LLDS license to sell all types of alcohol).
- Retailers that previously sold 3.2% beer may now begin selling beer over 0.5% beginning on January 1, 2019. New retailers may also begin selling fermented malt beverages after January 1, 2019, as long as they derive, at least, 20% of their gross total sales annual revenues from the sale of food items for consumption off their premises.
- The new law does not allow consumers to purchase beer at a self-checkout without assistance from and completion of the entire transaction by an employee of the licensed retail location.
- Lower percentage strength beer (3.2% beer) may still be available in Colorado after January 1, 2019, as retailers may want to offer this option for consumers and as the market demands the product. However, there is no mandate that retailers sell beer 3.2% or less.
- The age to purchase alcohol has not changed and remains 21 years and older.
- Retailers may not sell full-strength beer to a consumer for consumption off the licensed premises unless the retail licensee or employee verifies that the consumer is at least 21 years of age. The licensed retailer must require the consumer to present a valid identification, unless, the consumer reasonably appears to be over fifty years of age.
- State law mandates no beer sales on Christmas Day for off premised consumption.

