

Pharmacists Warn of the Dangers of Mixing Alcohol with Medicines

- - Pharmacists warn that mixing alcohol with over the counter or prescription medicines can have unpredictable effects leading to chronic health problems

18 December 2020: While Ireland prepares for a very different Christmas without the usual office parties and family get togethers, pharmacists have warned people not to let their guard down with regard to mixing alcohol with medicines, which can lead to severe side-effects and chronic health problems. Community pharmacist and IPU Treasurer Ann Marie Horan explained the potential dangers; “Alcohol is a drug and just like any other drug it can have a significant impact if consumed alongside certain medications. Even small amounts of alcohol, which can stay in the body far longer than many people realise, can react dangerously with other medications, even commonly-used over-the-counter items such as cold remedies, pain relievers and antihistamines. “In addition, some medicines are rendered less effective when taken in conjunction with alcohol. This could leave people’s health vulnerable, particularly if they are unaware that their particular condition is not being treated effectively. “If you are taking any medication it is very important that you take time to understand how it could interact with alcohol. This is something that your pharmacist can advise you on, but if you are in any doubt you should avoid alcohol. Among the biggest concerns is mixing alcohol with opiate pain relievers or benzodiazepines (often used to treat anxiety or as sleeping tablets), as this significantly increases the risks of a dangerous overdose and should be avoided.” Ms Horan concluded by advising patients to speak with their pharmacist; “While many of us will look forward to enjoying a glass of mulled wine or other festive drink, if you are on any medication, the best way to know if it is safe is to ask your pharmacist.”