

GUIDE

Current Standards – Constitution and Stability



SAQ

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Titles and phrases that are underlined and in blue refer to documents and websites where more detailed information can be found.

The limits specified in this guide are based on standards set by the Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ). They do not replace the applicable Canadian regulations, be it in content or scope, irrespective of the regulations of the producing countries.

1. Main Current Standards

The following tables do not constitute an exhaustive list of the standards in effect in Canada and Quebec. However, the main applicable standards are shown. We encourage you to follow the links to the official websites of the various government bodies for detailed information on all the standards in effect.

[Food and Drug Regulations](#)

[Regulation respecting cider and other apple-based beverages](#)

[Regulation respecting wine and other alcoholic beverages made or bottled by holders of a wine maker's permit](#)

[Health Canada's \(Maximum Levels\) for Chemical Contaminants in Foods](#)

[List of Permitted Food Additives](#)

[Maximum Residue Limits for Pesticides](#)

1.1 Wine, Beer and Cider

Parameter	Maximum Limit		
	Wine	Beer	Cider
Sorbic acid or potassium sorbate (calculated as sorbic acid)	200 ppm 500 ppm if the reducing sugar content is greater than 10 g/L	Unauthorized	500 ppm
Volatile acidity (expressed as grams of sulphuric acid per litre)	0.98 g/L Special process wines (e.g. icewine) will be considered on a case by case basis.		Cidre bouché : 0.8 g/L Other: 1.64 g/L
Sulphurous Acid	70 ppm free SO ₂ 420 ppm total SO ₂	15 ppm	70 ppm free SO ₂ 420 ppm total SO ₂
Dimethyl dicarbonate (DMDC)	200 ppm	Unauthorized	Unauthorized
Potassium ferrocyanide	0.5 ppm of potassium ferrocyanide 0.21 ppm of total cyanides	Unauthorized	Undetectable after processing
Copper	1 ppm	-	-
Arsenic	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm

Lead	0.2 ppm	0.2 ppm	0.2 ppm
Methyl alcohol	420 ppm		420 ppm Ice cider: 700 ppm
Soluble sulphates	2,000 ppm	-	-
Ethyl carbamate (Urethane)	Wine: 30 ppb Fortified wines: 100 ppb	15 ppb 30 ppb (strong and extra-strong beer)	-
Ochratoxin A	2 ppb	-	-
Iprodione	5 ppm		-
Procymidone	1 ppm	-	-
Pesticide residues standardized for raw materials	PMRA standards for grapes	-	PMRA standards for apples
Other pesticide residues*	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm

ppm: parts per million. Equivalent to mg/L.

ppb: parts per billion. Equivalent to µg/L.

*For a given pesticide residue in which no standard has been established by the Health Canada Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), the maximum allowed concentration of the residue is 0.1 ppm for any given food.

1.2 Spirits, Liqueurs and Fruit Brandy

Parameter	Maximum Limit		
	Spirits	Fruit Brandy	Liqueur
Arsenic	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm	0.1 ppm
Lead	0.2 ppm	0.2 ppm	0.2 ppm
Ethyl carbamate (Urethane)	150 ppb	400 ppb	400 ppb
Methyl alcohol	8,000 ppm	8,000 ppm	-
Total Thujone (α -thujone + β -thujone)	-	-	10 ppm (liqueur and herb-based beverages whose percentage of alcohol is \geq 25% ABV) 1 ppm (liqueur and herb-based beverages whose percentage of alcohol is < 25% ABV)

ppm: parts per million. Equivalent to mg/L.

ppb: parts per billion. Equivalent to µg/L.

1.3 Unstandardized Alcoholic Beverages¹

Parameter	Maximum Limit	Type of Alcoholic Beverage
Sorbic acid	500 ppm	Honey wine (mead)
	1,000 ppm	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages
Sulphurous Acid	70 ppm free SO ₂ 420 ppm total SO ₂	Honey wine (mead)
	100 ppm	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages
Benzoic acid or potassium benzoate	1,000 ppm (calculated for benzoic acid)	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages
Sodium stearoyl-2-lactylate	0.35 %	Unstandardized cream-based spirits
Sucrose acetate isobutyrate	300 ppm	Alcoholic beverages containing citrus or spruce oils as consumed
Arsenic	0.1 ppm	All alcoholic beverages
Lead	0.2 ppm	All alcoholic beverages
Ethyl carbamate (Urethane)	200 ppb	Sake

ppm: parts per million. Equivalent to mg/L.

ppb: parts per billion. Equivalent to µg/L.

2. Chemical and Microbiological Stability

All alcoholic beverages distributed by the SAQ must be conditioned in a manner that ensures their stability with respect to the development of oenological defects that can affect their visual appearance and/or organoleptic qualities.

3. Sediments in Wines

The presence of certain sediments (e.g. tartaric salts, colouring matter) is acceptable in red wines and may be accepted in specialty white wines. However, in such cases, we strongly recommend affixing to the bottles a short text explaining the nature of the sediment in order to inform and reassure customers regarding the product's quality.

¹ Unstandardized alcoholic beverages are all alcoholic beverages for which no legal definition is found in the [Food and Drug Regulations](#) of Canada.

4. Tolerances for Declared Alcoholic Strength

The tolerances for the alcoholic strength declared on the label with respect to the value obtained by distillation using a method recognized by the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV) are presented in the following table:

[International Methods of Analysis of Wines and Musts](#)

[International Methods of Analysis of Spirituous Beverages of Vitivincultural Origin](#)

Category	Tolerance
Wine	± 1.0 %
Fortified wine	± 0.5 %
Cider	± 0.5 % if the declared alcoholic strength is between 2.5 and 5.5 % ± 1.0 % if the declared alcoholic strength is between 5.6 and 13.0 %
Beer	± 0.5 % if the declared alcoholic strength is 5.5 % or lower ± 1.0 % if the declared alcoholic strength is 5.6 % or higher
Spirits	± 0.3 %
Other	± 0.5 %

5. Sulphites in Organic Products Made from Grapes or Other Fruits

The use of sulphites is permitted in organic products made from grapes or other fruit. However, the maximum concentrations permitted under the Canadian Organic Products Regulations are more restrictive than those allowed by the Food and Drug Regulations.

[Organic Products Regulations](#)

[Organic Production Systems – Permitted Substances Lists](#)

Percentage of residual sugar	Maximum allowed concentration of sulphites
Less than 5 % residual sugar	30 ppm free SO ₂ 100 ppm total SO ₂
5 % or more but less than 10 % residual sugar	35 ppm free SO ₂ 150 ppm total SO ₂
10 % or more residual sugar	45 ppm free SO ₂ 250 ppm total SO ₂

6. Permitted Additives

To know whether an additive is authorized in Canada, please refer to the [list of permitted food additives](#) available on the Health Canada website. Preservatives and additives not listed for a specific use are not permitted for that use. Note that the terms “unstandardized foods” and “unstandardized beverages” used in the various tables include unstandardized alcoholic beverages.

6.1 Coloring agents

The [list of permitted natural and artificial colouring agents](#) is available on the Health Canada website. If a colouring agent is not specifically permitted for a given product, it cannot be added to the product. The following table lists only the colouring agents for which a maximum limit exists. Other colouring agents are permitted in accordance with good manufacturing practice.

Coloring Agent	Type of product	Maximum Limit
β -apo-8'- carotenal; Ethyl β -apo-8'- carotenoate	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	35 ppm
Amaranth; Erythrosine; Indigotine; Sunset Yellow FCF; Allura Red; Tartrazine	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	300 ppm (singly or in combination)
Brilliant Blue FCF; Fast Green FCF	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	100 ppm (singly or in combination)
Potassium aluminum silicate based iron oxide	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	0.5%. If any combination of potassium aluminum silicate based iron oxide, potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide or potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide and iron oxide is used, the total amount not to exceed 0.5%.
Potassium aluminum silicate based titanium dioxide	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	0.5%. If any combination of potassium aluminum silicate based iron oxide, potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide or potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide and iron oxide is used, the total amount not to exceed 0.5%.
Potassium aluminum silicate	Unstandardized alcoholic beverages	0.5%. If any combination of potassium aluminum silicate-

based titanium dioxide and iron oxide		based iron oxide, potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide or potassium aluminum silicate-based titanium dioxide and iron oxide is used, the total amount not to exceed 0.5%.
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6.2 Sweeteners

The [list of permitted sweeteners](#) is available on the Health Canada website. If a sweetener is not specifically permitted for a given product, it cannot be added to the product. The following table lists only the sweeteners for which a maximum limits exists. Other sweeteners are permitted in accordance with good manufacturing practice.

Sweetener	Type of product	Maximum Limit
Acesulfame potassium	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	0.05 %
Advantame	Unstandardized alcoholic Beverages	10 ppm in products as consumed
	Unstandardized coffee- and tea-based alcoholic beverages	3 ppm in products as consumed
Aspartame	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	0.1 %
Erythriol	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	3.5 %
Neotame	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	0.003 %
Steviol glycosides	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	0.02 % (calculated as steviol equivalents)
Sucralose	Unstandardized alcoholic beverage	0.07 %

7. Caffeine

Adding caffeine is not permitted in alcoholic beverages in Canada. However, some alcoholic beverages may contain small amounts of caffeine derived from natural sources such as coffee, tea, cola, cacao, guarana and yerba mate. The SAQ limits the caffeine content of the alcoholic beverages that it sells to 30 mg per serving.

8. Common Names to Be Used on Labels

The name to be used for a product is regulated by Canadian and Quebec laws and regulations.

For example, the Food and Drug Regulations regulate the use of the following names and their variants:

Whisky/Whiskey	Rum	Gin
Brandy	Liqueur	Vodka
Tequila	Mezcal	Wine
Cider	Beer	

It should also be noted that a Quebec regulation regulates the use of authorized names for cider and apple-based alcoholic beverages. For more information, see the [Regulation respecting cider and other apple-based alcoholic beverages](#).

Other laws and regulations apply to alcoholic beverages bottled in Quebec, namely:

[Regulation respecting wine and other alcoholic beverages made or bottled by holders of a wine maker's permit](#)

[Regulation respecting alcoholic beverages made with beer](#)

[Regulation respecting alcoholic beverages made and bottled by holders of a distiller's permit](#)

[Purchase and Bottling of Spirits Regulation](#)

[Regulation respecting the terms of sale of alcoholic beverages by holders of a grocery permit](#)

[Act respecting development of the small-scale alcoholic beverage industry](#)

9. Chemical and Organoleptic Characteristics

Alcoholic beverages must possess chemical and organoleptic characteristics consistent with their origins and meet the quality standards of the SAQ.