



# PREVENTING FASD: HEALTHY WOMEN, HEALTHY BABIES

Alcohol abuse is a serious public health concern. Did you know that alcohol can harm a fetus at any point in its development, often before a woman knows she's pregnant?

“Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders” (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with lifelong implications. The term FASD is not intended for use as a clinical diagnosis. It refers to conditions such as fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND), and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD).

**If women do not drink alcohol during pregnancy, FASD is 100 percent preventable.** The Surgeon General issued an advisory in February 2005 to help share this important message and to urge health professionals to identify and assist women who are drinking or at risk of drinking during pregnancy.

## WHO IS AT RISK?

Any pregnant woman who drinks alcohol is at risk of having a child with an FASD, regardless of her education, income, or ethnicity. Women who are at particularly high risk of drinking during pregnancy and having a child with an FASD include:

- Women with substance abuse or mental health problems
- Women who have already had a child with an FASD<sup>1,2</sup>
- Recent drug users
- Smokers
- Women who have multiple sex partners
- Recent victims of abuse and violence

Alcohol is a potent teratogen, a substance that can damage a developing fetus. There is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy, so pregnant women or women who may become pregnant should not drink any alcohol from conception to birth.

## TREATMENT FOR WOMEN

Many women who need alcohol treatment may not receive it due to lack of money or child care, fear of losing custody of their children, or other barriers. For successful recovery, women often need a continuum of care for an extended period of time, including:

- Comprehensive inpatient or outpatient treatment for alcohol and other drugs
- Case management
- Counseling and other mental health treatment

## Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol Use in Pregnancy

- A pregnant woman should not drink alcohol during pregnancy.
- A pregnant woman who has already consumed alcohol during her pregnancy should stop in order to minimize further risk.
- A woman who is considering becoming pregnant should abstain from alcohol.
- Recognizing that nearly half of all births in the United States are unplanned, women of childbearing age should consult their physician and take steps to reduce the possibility of prenatal alcohol exposure.
- Health professionals should inquire routinely about alcohol consumption by women of childbearing age, inform them of the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and advise them not to drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy.

—Surgeon General Richard Carmona,  
February 2005

- Medical and prenatal care
- Child care
- Transportation
- Followup pediatric and early intervention services for children
- Services that respond to women's needs regarding reproductive health, sexuality, relationships, and victimization



