

Make Your Community Stronger: How You Can Promote Alcohol-Free Pregnancy

Communities are safe and supportive places where people know and care about their neighbors. They are where people raise their families, work, play, shop, go to school, and share traditions. The community has always been central to the lives of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Historically, members of Native communities have hunted and fished together, celebrated and mourned together, and worked together to maintain a good quality of life for their people.

This information sheet helps to define “fetal alcohol spectrum disorders” (FASD) and provides strategies that community members can use to help prevent FASD.

What Is FASD?

“FASD” is a term that describes a range of lifelong effects that can occur in someone whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Children whose mothers drank during pregnancy may need surgeries to fix physical problems. They may also have brain damage that can make it hard to remember things or solve problems. They may not be able to follow simple instructions or form friendships. These challenges may make it difficult to focus in school or follow everyday routines. Children with an FASD may require ongoing medical attention and special programs and schools. The impact of these additional services can strain family and community resources. Every year, at least 40,000 babies are born with an FASD.*

Facts To Remember and Share

The following are important facts to remember and share about FASD and drinking alcohol during pregnancy:

- ❖ FASD is permanent. It cannot be cured.
- ❖ FASD is 100 percent preventable. If a woman doesn't drink when she's pregnant, her baby will not have an FASD.



- ❖ There is no known safe time, safe amount, or safe type of alcohol to drink while pregnant. Beer and wine are just as harmful as hard liquor.
- ❖ If a pregnant woman stops drinking as soon as possible, she can improve her chances of having a healthy baby.

Strategies

Communities can strengthen themselves by working together to stop FASD. Here are some general strategies that can help get the word out about FASD, make you a better neighbor, and strengthen your community.

- ❖ **Start with yourself.** If you are a woman and are pregnant or may become pregnant, take the healthy path and do not drink alcohol. There is no “safe” amount of alcohol that can be drunk during pregnancy. Drinking while nursing can also harm a baby’s health.
- ❖ **Remember that pregnancy is a sacred time.** Help the pregnant women in your life engage in healthy, alcohol-free activities during pregnancy.
- ❖ **Information is power.** Approach educators, school officials, health care providers, and staff at social service agencies about giving information out on drinking and FASD. Read up on FASD in this resource kit, on the computer, or at the library. Share the information with friends and family members.
- ❖ **Support and encourage alcohol-free community activities.** Organize cultural activities and events that are alcohol free.
- ❖ **Lead by example.** If you are a community leader or the spouse, partner, relative, or friend of a pregnant woman, provide sober leadership, support, and/or friendship.
- ❖ **Get the message out.** Contact local officials about posting signs in restaurants, bars, and other places that serve or sell alcohol to warn people about the dangers of drinking when pregnant. (Visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration FASD Center for Excellence Web site, www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov, for printable materials ready for posting.)
- ❖ **Get help.** Help community members in need find alcohol-related services, including meetings, clinics, and traditional healing methods.
- ❖ **Share good news.** Listen for and share good news and stories about people—including yourself—who have overcome alcohol abuse and had healthy babies.

American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Initiative
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

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(Strategies Continued)**

Finding the best way to share information in your community is important. Some American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian groups have begun to use prevention strategies based on cultural practices to increase awareness about the risks of drinking while pregnant or nursing. The strategies emphasize traditional values, such as the importance of families; the wisdom of elders; and a holistic view of health, which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Work with members of your own community, such as leaders, elders, teachers, friends, and neighbors, to get the right message to the right people.

Understanding and preventing FASD will help strengthen your community and people. By caring about the health of future generations, you will carry on your traditions and move your community forward.

* May, P.A., and Gossage, J.P. 2001. Estimating the prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome: A summary. *Alcohol Research & Health* 25(3):159-167.

Pregnancy is Sacred

For more information, visit fasdcenter.samhsa.gov or call 866-STOPFAS.
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov