

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders



Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) can cause serious disabilities that last a lifetime. They can affect how a person looks, grows, learns, and acts. But, FASDs are 100% preventable—if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.

- FASD is a term that describes the range of effects that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol while pregnant. These effects can include physical and mental disabilities and problems with behavior or learning. Often, a person has a mix of these problems. The term FASD is not intended for use as a clinical diagnosis.
- People with an FASD often have problems with learning, memory, attention span, problem solving, speech, and hearing. They are at very high risk for trouble in school, trouble with the law, alcohol and drug abuse, and mental health disorders.
- FASDs include fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which causes growth problems, abnormal facial features, and central nervous system problems. Children who do not have all of the symptoms of FAS can have another FASD. These children can have problems that are just as severe as those of children with FAS.
- It is not known exactly how many people have an FASD. Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have shown that 0.2 to 1.5 cases of FAS occur for every 1,000 live births in the United States. Other studies using different methods have estimated the rate of FAS at 0.5 to 2.0 cases per 1,000 live births. Scientists believe that there are at least four times as many cases of FASDs as FAS.



There is no known amount of alcohol use that is safe during pregnancy. There is no known time during pregnancy when alcohol use is safe.

- All drinks with alcohol can hurt an unborn baby. A 12-ounce can of beer has as much alcohol as a 4-ounce glass of wine or a 1-ounce shot of liquor. Some drinks, like malt beverages, wine coolers, and mixed drinks, have more alcohol than a 12-ounce can of beer.
- A woman should not drink any alcohol if she is pregnant or planning to get pregnant. If a woman could become pregnant, she should talk to her doctor and take steps to lower the chance of exposing her baby to alcohol.
- FASDs last a lifetime—there is no cure. But if children with an FASD are identified early, they can receive services to help increase their well-being.
- FASDs are 100% preventable—if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.