



Understanding and Preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Healthcare professionals, along with families and friends, are all encouraged to discuss the importance of an alcohol-free pregnancy

By Jennifer Faringer

While September is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness (FASD) month, it's important to understand and prevent FASDs year-round.

What can you do?

Share with friends and family the importance of staying alcohol-free while pregnant. No amount of alcohol has been proven to be safe to drink at any time during pregnancy — this includes beer, wine, wine coolers or any form of alcoholic beverage which are all just as harmful to the unborn child as hard liquor.

Alcohol affects multiple organs

in the body with the brain (specifically the brain's executive function-decision making) being the most severely impacted.

Alcohol use during pregnancy can affect a child's cognitive abilities, emotional regulation and behaviors.

FASDs are the leading cause of preventable developmental and cognitive delays.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 20 Americans may have an FASD which is 2.5 times more than autism. Among those who have been affected by alcohol in utero, there are a whole host of co-occur-

ring conditions that include:

- 28.4% attention deficit disorder
- 26.1% cardiovascular problems
- 23.9% gastrointestinal problems
- 23.2% anxiety disorders
- 23% nicotine dependence
- 21.8% major depressive disorder
- 19.4% intellectual and developmental disorders
- 19.4% suicidal ideations
- 19.3% long-term drug use
- 16.8% post-traumatic stress disorder

Health care professionals are encouraged to consider prenatal alcohol exposure and FASD when working with patients that have any of the above co-occurring disorders. Proactively, healthcare professionals, along with families and friends, are all encouraged to discuss the importance of an alcohol-free pregnancy.

In New York state, more than 221,500 babies are born annually with more than 11,000 estimated to have FASD.

These numbers far exceed the diagnostic capacity.

More than 90% of individuals with FASD develop comorbid mental health conditions. For older youth and adults with FASD, they struggle with independent living and finding and maintaining employment. Individuals with FASD who may or may not be diagnosed face high rates of incarceration and recidivism. The annual cost for FASD in New York state alone is more than \$12.03 billion and includes health care, special education, residential care, productivity losses and corrections costs.

Of nearly 2.5 million students in New York schools, as many as 122,850 may have FASD with far fewer diagnosed. Without the appropriate diagnosis, students with FASD experience a higher-than-average school exclusion rate.

Local Resources

Help is available. Locally, we are fortunate to have a FASD diagnostic and evaluation clinic through the Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at URMC's Golisano Children's Hospital. Additional intervention resources are also available through URMC.

Information and education are available through the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Rochester Area (NCADD-RA).

For parents of children with FASD, the NCADD-RA hosts a FASD parent network and support group monthly.

To learn more, visit www.ncadd-ra.org.

To schedule a presentation for your school or community group, contact jfaringer@depaul.org



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