

Alcohol and pregnancy

Raising awareness about fetal alcohol spectrum disorders

Millions of parents are raising children who have been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

FASD is an umbrella term referring to a brain based physical disability which occurs when a fetus is exposed to alcohol.

Many different diagnoses fall into under the umbrella of FASD. A diagnosis of full-scale Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is quite rare. More often people are diagnosed with A.R.N.D. or Alcohol Related Neurodevelopment Disorder. This occurs at a rate of one in every 100 live births, a rate greater than Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, and Cerebral Palsy combined.

Do you know a woman of childbearing age? Then you know someone at risk for having a child affected with FASD. Many think it won't happen to them, but with as many as 60 per cent of all pregnancies unplanned it is a true possibility.

Some health professionals still say it's okay to have an occasional glass of wine. But speak to anyone raising a child with FASD and they'll beg you not to take the risk.

Any alcohol can be harmful during pregnancy.

Alcohol in the womb of a developing fetus can permanently damage the brain, central nervous system, organs and the very cells of that fetus. For women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant there are resources and organizations that can provide education and support on leading a healthy pre-natal lifestyle.

Families raising children with FASD or related disorders can also get support. In Delta, Reach Child and Youth Development Society offers the provincially-funded Delta Connex program, which provides support to families who have children birth through 19 with a diagnosis of FASD or related conditions.

The program addresses issues associated with the diagnosis and builds on family's strengths, and also provides workshops on a variety of related topics. Reach Delta Connex will be launching a Facebook site Sept. 9—the 10th annual International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day—to support FASD awareness and education.

■ *Camille Netherton is a Manager of the Delta Connex Program at Reach Child and Youth Development Society. Reach provides programs for children from birth to 19 and their families, and this year is celebrating 50 years of service. For more information call 604-946-6622, e-mail info@reachdevelopment.org or visit www.reachdevelopment.org.*



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Reaching
Out