

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy puts your developing baby at risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, also known as FASD.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or FASD is the term used to describe the problems and disorders resulting from alcohol use during pregnancy. These can include birth defects, slow growth, brain damage, and vision and hearing problems.

The effect of alcohol on the developing brain can mean that children will have lifelong learning difficulties and problems with memory, reasoning and judgment.

People with FASD are also at high risk of other concerns, such as mental health concerns, disrupted schooling, and addictions.

How much alcohol causes FASD?

Alcohol use during pregnancy can harm the developing baby. Exactly how much alcohol it takes to cause harm is not known.

The potential harm to a developing baby is influenced by the following factors:

- The mother's overall health and safety
- How much alcohol is used
- If other drugs or medication are being used at the same time
- Genetics and many other factors

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. The baby's brain and nervous system develop all throughout pregnancy.

Alcohol is in beer, wine, hard liquor, coolers and ciders.

A drink means:

Beer, cider or cooler <i>5% alcohol</i>	one 12 oz. bottle (341 ml)
Wine <i>12% alcohol</i>	one 5 oz. glass (142 ml)
Hard liquor (vodka, rye, gin, rum, etc.) <i>40% alcohol</i>	one 1.5 oz shot (43 ml) (straight or in a mixed drink)

(Note: 1 Canadian standard drink = 17.05 ml or 13.45g of ethanol)

All drinks with alcohol can be harmful to the developing baby.

Does drinking during breastfeeding cause FASD?

No. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy puts your developing baby at risk of FASD. If you drink alcohol and breastfeed, your baby's sleep or the amount of milk your baby takes at feeding time may be affected. It is best not to drink alcohol when you are breastfeeding. If you are going to have a drink that contains alcohol, it is recommended that you feed your baby first (or pump) and then wait until the alcohol has passed out of your breastmilk before breastfeeding again. You can pump or express as needed to relieve any discomfort from engorgement. Breastfeeding is not recommended if you drink large amounts of alcohol.

When can FASD and other effects of alcohol be diagnosed?

FASD and related conditions are often diagnosed after a child has behavioral or learning problems. Most children with FASD do not have differences in physical

appearance. Children diagnosed before 6 years of age tend to do best because support services can be provided early.

What is the treatment for a child with FASD?

The characteristics of children with FASD can be different in each child. A team of specialists is required to assess, diagnose, and treat a child with FASD.

There are 4 diagnostic categories:

- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Partial FAS (pFAS)
- Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND)
- Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD)

There is no cure for FASD, a lifelong condition. A person with FASD may process information differently, have difficulty understanding concepts and consequences, and have delayed social maturity. It is possible to adapt the situation and provide support by understanding a person's strengths.

Recognizing FASD early can give a person with FASD the best chance to reach his or her full potential. Early diagnosis and support in a safe and healthy family situation may help prevent future issues such as difficulty at school, mental health or other health concerns.

Where can families and caregivers go for help?

Community resources, such as child development programs, may help support families and children.

Two services are now available across B.C. to assist families of children and youth with FASD and similar conditions.

- Key Workers help families understand FASD by providing information and connecting them to support services.
- Parent Support includes mentoring, offering support groups, and FASD training for parents and grandparents.

Some communities have additional support services and groups for mothers and their children with FASD.

For more information, please see the Ministry of Children and Family Development website at www.gov.bc.ca/mcf or www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/assessment.htm.

For information on prevention of FASD, see HealthLink BC File [#38d Pregnancy and Alcohol Use](#).

The FASD Connections website at www.fasdconnections.ca provides more information on all aspects of FASD for parents, caregivers, professionals, and others.

For information on services in your area, please contact your local public health unit or health authority at www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.