

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

### What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term used to describe a range of health and behavioural problems affecting babies whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy.

FASD is the leading known cause of developmental disability in children. It can include lifelong physical, learning and behavioural disabilities. Children with FASD have problems with hearing, speech and vision, learning, memory and coordination.

### How much alcohol causes FASD?

**There is no safe amount, safe time or safe type of alcohol during pregnancy.** It is not known how much alcohol it takes to cause harm. Your baby's brain and nervous system develop throughout your pregnancy.

All types of alcohol, including beer, wine, hard liquor, coolers and ciders, can harm your baby. Binge drinking, that is, drinking more than 3 standard drinks at any one time, and drinking throughout your pregnancy, are very harmful to your baby.

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

- The mother's overall health and well-being
- Alcohol drinking patterns such as binge drinking and heavy drinking
- If illegal or street drugs, or medication are being used at the same time
- Genetics and many other factors

For more information on pregnancy and alcohol use, see [HealthLinkBC File #38d Pregnancy and Alcohol Use](#).

### Does drinking during breastfeeding cause FASD?

No, drinking alcohol while breastfeeding does not cause FASD. However, your baby is exposed to a small amount of the alcohol that passes into breast milk when you drink. This can affect your baby's sleep-wake pattern, your milk letdown, the amount of milk your baby takes at feeding time and your baby's behaviour.

It is best to avoid alcohol if you're breastfeeding, but if you want to have an occasional drink, it does not mean you need to stop breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is important for the health and well being of both mothers and babies. If you choose to drink alcohol while breastfeeding, it is important that you plan around it. If you are going to have a drink, it is recommended that you feed your baby, and store milk, before you start drinking. How soon you can start breastfeeding again will depend on how many drinks you have had. Ideally, it is best to avoid breastfeeding for about 2 hours after drinking for each alcoholic beverage consumed. For example, if a woman has 2 alcoholic drinks, she should wait at least 4 hours before breastfeeding.

You can pump or express as needed to relieve any discomfort from engorgement, but "pumping and dumping" breast milk will not get rid of alcohol from breast milk faster. Only time allows the alcohol level in the breast milk to drop.

## 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.

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 in your regional health authority, such as child development programs, may help support families and children. Examples of available services include:

- Key Workers - helps 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 on these and other local programs and services in your area, visit Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) at [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/healthy-women-children/child-behaviour-development/special-needs/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/healthy-women-children/child-behaviour-development/special-needs/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd).

For contact information to your local public health unit and to find services that are available in your area visit the HealthLink BC Services and Resources Directory at [www.healthlinkbc.ca/find](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/find) or call **8-1-1**. When you call the public health unit ask for a public health nurse.

## For More Information

### HealthyFamilies BC

HealthyFamilies BC provides pregnant and expecting parents information about FASD and the risks and health effects of drinking alcohol in pregnancy.

[www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting)

### Canadian FASD Research Network (CanFASD) FASD Fact Sheet

<https://canfasd.ca/media/fasd-fact-sheet/>