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FACT SHEET

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the possible effects in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome) is the most medically identifiable and most serious disorder under the FASD umbrella.
- When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her unborn baby. Alcohol in the mother's blood stream passes through the placenta to the baby through the umbilical cord. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth and a range of lifelong disorders.
- FASD affects 1 in 100 infants each year – more than autism, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Cystic Fibrosis, Spina Bifida and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome combined.
- Individuals with FASD may suffer from: abnormal heart structure, behavior problems, mental retardation, problems in the structure of the head, eyes, nose or mouth, and slow growth and poor coordination after birth.
- FASD is the leading known preventable cause of mental retardation and birth defects, and a leading known cause of learning disabilities.
- 12.2 percent of pregnant women (about 1 in 8) reported any alcohol use. This rate has remained stable over a 15-year period.
- Each year, as many as 40,000 babies are born with an FASD. The cost to the nation for FAS alone is about \$6 billion a year.
- FASD can affect anyone regardless of ethnicity, income or educational level. They are not genetic disorders.
- There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant. There is also no safe time during pregnancy to drink and no safe kind of alcohol.
- Alcohol produces the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus, more than abuse of heroin, cocaine and marijuana. Alcohol abuse results in life-long permanent disorders of memory function, impulse control and judgment.
- The problems caused by FASD are not curable, but they are 100 percent preventable. Clinical and public health leaders recommend that women who are planning to get pregnant or are already pregnant abstain from alcohol.
- Children born with FASD may need medical care all their lives. The comprehensive lifetime cost of just one affected person with FAS could be as much as \$5 million. This estimate includes medical care services and productivity losses.