VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Alcohol & Pregnancy — Guidance for Women

How much alcohol is safe to drink while pregnant?

No amount of alcohol can be considered safe during pregnancy. When you drink so does your baby. Alcohol can interfere with healthy development causing brain damage and other birth defects.

Is any kind of alcohol safe to drink during pregnancy?

No. Any kind of alcohol can harm your growing baby. That includes beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor and mixed drinks. A 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine and a 1-ounce shot of liquor have the same amount of alcohol.

Is there a safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol can affect the baby every trimester of pregnancy.

Why is alcohol a problem?

Alcohol is a teratogen, a substance than can harm the developing baby. The areas that might be affected by alcohol exposure depend on which areas are developing at the time alcohol is consumed. Since the brain and the central nervous system are developing throughout the entire pregnancy, the baby's brain is always vulnerable to damage from alcohol exposure.

What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of physical, mental, behavioral, and learning disabilities that can occur to an individual whose mother drank during pregnancy. The term FASD is not a clinical diagnosis.

FASD describes irreversible brain damage which may result in any of several alcohol-related medical diagnoses including fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND) and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD).

Can FASD be cured?

There is no cure for FASDs. Problems resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure are lifelong.

How are FASDs prevented?

FASDs are 100% preventable. The only sure way to prevent FASDs is to totally avoid alcohol while trying to get pregnant, during pregnancy or after having unprotected sex where it was possible to get pregnant.

Why are some babies affected by prenatal alcohol exposure and some are not?

Every pregnancy is different. Drinking alcohol can hurt some babies more than others. Factors include amount used, duration of use, patterns of use, timing, genetic factors, and maternal nutrition. Often, birth defects caused by alcohol are not apparent at birth or even early childhood, but may be identified as learning, behavioral or other problems later in life.

What if I drank alcohol before I knew I was pregnant?

The best thing to do when you find out you are pregnant is to stop drinking alcohol. The sooner you stop drinking, the less your baby will be harmed by alcohol. Talk with your doctor if you have been using alcohol or if you find it hard to stop drinking.

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/index.html
The CDC provides Information for healthcare providers, women, families and educators. The site includes facts, data and statistics, research & tracking, training & education, articles, free materials, multimedia & tools, links to other websites.

Vermont Alcohol & Drug Information Clearinghouse (VADIC)
www.vadic.org
VADIC provides individuals, agencies and communities with informational resources pertaining to substance abuse and at-risk issues. A variety of brochures, posters and videos/DVDs addressing alcohol and pregnancy related issues are available free of charge for Vermonters and are accessible via a dedicated website, by phone and in person.

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