



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



'049' = Zero Alcohol for Nine Months of Pregnancy



News Release: May 20, 2013

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BURLINGTON – A mother's use of even small amounts of alcohol can cause health problems for her baby, a fact that many women and their health care providers may not realize. Drinking can affect development in the very first weeks – even before a woman knows she's pregnant – and throughout pregnancy.

The Vermont Department of Health is launching an informational outreach campaign called '049'. The campaign is designed to inform women of childbearing age and encourage health care providers to advise their patients to drink zero alcohol while trying to become pregnant, and throughout nine months of pregnancy.

"Healthcare providers need to send the clear message to women that no alcohol during pregnancy is safe for the developing brain," said Breena Holmes, MD, director of maternal and child health for the Health Department.

In Vermont, health care providers advising women not to drink resulted in a significantly lower prevalence of drinking during pregnancy. When not advised by a health care provider to abstain from alcohol, nearly 18 percent of women reported drinking alcohol during pregnancy, compared to 11 percent of those women who were advised by a health care provider to not drink. About one in four women reported that their health care provider did not advise them to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy.

Women who are trying to have a baby should also not drink alcohol, yet 73 percent of Vermont women who were trying to get pregnant drank alcohol in the three months before pregnancy.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is a term that describes a range of physical, mental, behavioral and learning disabilities that can affect a baby due to maternal drinking during pregnancy, including fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder and alcohol-related birth defects. Prenatal exposure to alcohol can affect a child's growth, appearance, cognitive development and behavior.

Colleen Gorun, who works for the Health Department's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, has not had any alcohol in the past two years. She made a commitment to not drink alcohol during pregnancy. Her decision was a point of pride that she planned to tell her children about as they grew into young adulthood.

"I wanted to teach my children to make healthy decisions for their entire lifetime at a very young age through adulthood, and I will be proud to tell my children the choices that I've made to better their life and future," Gorun said. "For me, I want my children to have the best chance in life and not have any underlying effects that are associated with the risks of drinking alcohol. When I found out I was pregnant my entire world changed. I had so much love for this little baby and I didn't even know her yet. I made a choice to not drink during pregnancy because of the risk factors and complications it could have on my unborn child."

'049' posters, buttons, fact sheets, and patient handouts will be distributed by the Health Department's district offices to help health care providers advise and support women in the decision not to drink.

Increasing the percentage of pregnant women who drink no alcohol is a maternal and infant health goal of Healthy Vermonters 2020, the state's set of public health goals for the decade.

For more information about '049', visit <http://healthvermont.gov/adap/049> or dial 2-1-1.

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