



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department's '049' Campaign = Zero Alcohol for Nine Months of Pregnancy

Sept. 9 is International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day



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BENNINGTON – Public health officials and providers are working together to promote an informational outreach campaign launched in 2013 called '049' (zero alcohol for nine months of pregnancy).

A mother's use of even small amounts of alcohol can cause health problems for her baby. Drinking can affect development in the very first weeks – even before a woman knows she's pregnant – and throughout pregnancy.

Yet more than a quarter (26%) of Vermont mothers report they did not get advice from a health care provider to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy or while trying to conceive.

"Pregnant women pay very close attention to advice from a health care provider, especially when they realize that alcohol may harm their child," said Breena Holmes, MD, director of maternal and child health for the Health Department. "It's a message that women are receptive to, and it should be consistently encouraged and reinforced."

The Health Department's **12 district offices** have reached more than half of provider practices around the state with the '049' message. Increasing the percentage of pregnant women who drink zero alcohol is a goal of Healthy Vermonters 2020, the state's set of public health goals for the decade.

Deborah Dutcher, a public health nurse in the Bennington District Office, has met with doctors and nurses in her area at conferences and Grand Rounds discussions, and reached out to individual practices to spread the '049' message.

"We want everyone in the provider community to inform women about the dangers – similar to how 20 years ago the 'Buckle Up' campaign caught on so that now nearly everyone wears a seat belt," Dutcher said. "It's an initiative that has been really well received."

One of every 100 babies born are affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (also known as FASD), which can interfere with development and cause brain damage and other birth defects. Thirteen percent of Vermont women reported drinking during the last three months of their pregnancy.

Sept. 9 is International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day. The day was chosen so that on the ninth day of the ninth month of each year, the world will remember that during the nine months of pregnancy, a woman should abstain from alcohol. The first awareness day was Sept. 9, 1999.

For more information on the '049' initiative, visit healthvermont.gov/adap/049, or dial 2-1-1.

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