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BURLINGTON – Two years ago, the Vermont Department of Health launched an informational outreach campaign called '049' that asked women and health care providers to become more aware of how alcohol can cause health problems for babies.

A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) identifies prenatal exposure to alcohol as the leading preventable cause of birth defects and intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities in children.

The report, "Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders," stresses that no amount of alcohol should be considered safe to drink at any time during pregnancy. Women who drank in their first trimester were 12 times more likely to have a child with developmental issues, according to the report, compared to women who didn't drink at all.

The Health Department works with health care providers to promote the 049 message by advising women to drink zero alcohol during 9 months of pregnancy. If a woman was advised at a prenatal care visit not to drink alcohol, she was significantly less likely to drink during the pregnancy.

About one in four women in Vermont reported that their health care provider did not advise them to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy, according to Health Department data. Women who are trying to have a baby should also not drink alcohol, yet about 70 percent of Vermont women who were trying to get pregnant drank alcohol in the three months before pregnancy.

"No alcohol is safe during pregnancy, and we applaud the American Academy of Pediatrics for reminding the nation of that fact," said Breena Holmes, MD, director of Maternal & Child Health for the Vermont Department of Health.

For the full AAP report visit: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/5/e1395

For more information about '049' visit healthvermont.gov/adap/049 or dial 2-1-1.

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