

Eyes on



ABORIGINAL PARENTS



Alcohol use during pregnancy:

a dangerous “cocktail”



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
CLUSTER ON EARLY

child development



“I never used to drink alcohol when I was pregnant because I knew what would go wrong.”

Lucie Riche, Innu Elder and midwife, Davis Inlet, Report of the Northern Childbirth Workshop, 1990, p. 11.

What do we know?



- Alcohol use during pregnancy is a global health problem.
- The negative effects of alcohol use affect about 5% of children, and has been identified in all racial and cultural groups. This rate may be much higher in some First Nations and Inuit communities.
- No safe drinking limits during pregnancy have been established. Therefore, the most direct way to prevent the negative effects of alcohol exposure on children is for women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant to stop drinking alcohol.
- Frequent consumption of alcohol during pregnancy can lead to the following severe problems in children.
 - **Health:** low birth weight, physical malformations and delayed growth.
 - **Cognitive:** deficits in language, memory and problem solving.
 - **Behavioural:** attention difficulty, impulsivity and hyperactivity.
 - **Emotional:** irritability, greater reactivity to stress and negative feeling.
- These problems can persist over time and may lead to additional ones later in life (e.g. underemployment and mental illnesses).
- The risk of increasing the symptoms is even more important when alcohol use is combined with malnutrition during pregnancy.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... your alcohol consumption before and during pregnancy.

- Avoid drinking alcohol during the period you are trying to become pregnant.
- Stop drinking alcohol completely during pregnancy.
- Talk to your prenatal worker, midwife or other maternity care provider to support you as you try to stop drinking. Involve your partner, supportive friends, family, and elders to help you.
- If you are a teenage mother, talk to your school principal about what help can be provided at school.

... having a healthy diet.

- Consider taking dietary supplements before, during and after pregnancy. It may reduce the severity of symptoms in children affected by prenatal alcohol use.
- Consult a health professional (pharmacist) before taking any dietary supplements.

... the reality that parenting a child suffering from the negative effects of alcohol can be demanding for the entire family.

- Accept help provided by the healthcare system to support you.
- If you are worried about your child's development, ask a professional to help you get appropriate care and services. The earlier problems are identified, the better.
- Involve the entire family in group interventions. A good quality and stable family environment is essential.

"If we got pregnant, I would like him [my husband] to support me too in not drinking when I was pregnant."

Healthy Messages & Métis: Does one size fit all? NAHO Métis Centre in collaboration with Métis Nation BC, 2009, p. 16.





Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

