



National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Helping children & families by advocating for the prevention and intervention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, the leading known cause of mental retardation & birth defects in the United States.

FASD: What Young People Should Know



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an

umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank

alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.

FASD is 100% preventable if women abstain from drinking during pregnancy.

Young People and Drinking

Despite laws in every state that make it illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase or possess alcohol, young people report that alcohol is easy to obtain.

- ♦ Alcohol is by far the most commonly abused substance by female adolescents with 36.5% of girls ages 12 to 17 reporting alcohol use.
- ♦ Underage binge drinking has become a social norm in the United States, with more than 7.1 million youth, ages 12 to 20, participating in this type of drinking pattern. Binge drinking was defined in this survey as five or more alcohol drinks in a row.
- ♦ Standard drink sizes are defined as 1.5 oz. of 80 proof liquor, 12 oz. of regular beer, or 5 oz. of table wine. Many cocktails may contain more than 1.5 oz. of liquor, combining several shots of liquor.



“Of all the substances of abuse (including cocaine, heroin and marijuana), alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus.”

Institute of Medicine, 1996

Young People and Pregnancy

Unplanned pregnancy poses one of the greatest challenges to preventing FASD. Alcohol is a major factor in unprotected sex among youth, increasing their risk of unplanned pregnancies.

- ♦ The rates of teen pregnancy are noticeably high in the United States, estimated at one million per year, 85% of which are unplanned.
- ♦ Nearly one quarter of sexually active teens and young adults report having unprotected sex (using no form of contraception) because of alcohol or drug use.

Young women who are sexually active, not using contraception, and drinking alcohol are at risk for having a child with FASD.



Young people can help to prevent FASD by:

- ♦ Abstaining from alcohol use; abstaining from sexual intercourse;
- ♦ Volunteering with local FASD or substance abuse prevention coalitions;
- ♦ Organizing an FASD presentation for their school or other peer organization;
- ♦ Creating a peer education program to teach others about the consequences of drinking while pregnant;
- ♦ Writing letters to the editor or informational articles to their school newsletters or magazines that interest their age group;
- ♦ Select FASD as a topic for a school project;
- ♦ Encourage school/teachers to include FASD in their curriculum.