



# 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.

## FASD: What School Systems Should Know About Prevention

**Schools exercise a powerful influence over young people, making them ideal settings to educate about the dangers of underage drinking and sexual activity.**

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% (4.5 million) of girls ages 12 to 17 reporting alcohol use within the past year.
- Nearly 74% of adults report that they began drinking alcohol before the current legal drinking age of 21
- A nationwide study indicates that 60% of adolescents ages 12 to 17 who drink are binge drinkers (5 or more drinks in a row).

**Drinking predisposes young adults to risky sexual behaviors.**

- A study of adolescent drinkers found that problem drinkers are more likely than other drinkers to be sexually active, to have a greater number of partners, and to initiate sexual activity at younger ages.
- Among the reported 34% of currently sexually active students nationwide, 25% had drunk alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse

**“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.*

**Unplanned pregnancies pose one of the greatest challenges for prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) .**

- Roughly a million American teenagers become pregnant each year. The majority of these pregnancies (an estimated 78%) are unintended.
- 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.



**School Systems can help prevent FASD by:**

- Including information about FASD in health and/or human development course curricula;
- Providing alcohol-free recreation and entertainment opportunities for young adults;
- Supporting FASD peer-education programs; and
- Encouraging student participation in FASD or substance abuse-related community coalitions to meet required community service hours for graduation.

