Alcohol Use and Pregnancy

A mother's alcohol use during pregnancy is one of the top preventable causes of birth defects and developmental disabilities. There is no known amount of alcohol that is safe to drink while pregnant. There is no time during pregnancy when it is safe to drink. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, her baby does too.

• Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause many birth defects and developmental disabilities. These are known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs), and include fetal alcohol syndrome.
• FASDs can cause problems in how a person looks, grows, thinks, and acts. FASDs can also cause birth defects of the heart, brain, and other major organs.
• About 1 in 12 pregnant women in the United States reports alcohol use. And about 1 in 30 pregnant women in the United States reports binge drinking (having five or more drinks at one time).
• Alcohol can harm a baby at any time during pregnancy. It can cause problems in the early weeks of pregnancy, before a woman even knows she is pregnant.
• The good news is that **FASDs are 100% preventable**—if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.
• Health professionals should ask all of their female patients of childbearing age about alcohol use. They should tell women about the risks of using alcohol during pregnancy and advise them not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

The U.S. Surgeon General wants women to know they should not drink alcohol during pregnancy. In a 2005 advisory on alcohol use in pregnancy, he stated:

- A pregnant woman should not drink alcohol.

- A pregnant woman who has already used alcohol during her pregnancy should stop right away.

- A woman who is thinking about getting pregnant should stop using alcohol.

- Nearly half of all births in the United States are unplanned. Therefore, any woman who could become pregnant should talk to her doctor and take steps to lower the chance of exposing her baby to alcohol.

For more information on this topic and others, go to www.cdc.gov or ask your midwife.