



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



November 12, 2008 – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

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Parents make decisions that affect their children even before they are born. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, she risks giving birth to a child who will have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. According to the Institute of Medicine Report to Congress in 1996, “of all substances of abuse (including cocaine, heroin, and marijuana), alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus.” Every time a pregnant woman has a drink, the alcohol passes easily through the placenta from the mother’s bloodstream into her baby’s blood. Unlike many diseases that can affect the health of a newborn baby, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are 100% preventable.

An unborn child who has been exposed to alcohol can have deficits in virtually every part of the body, including the brain, face, eyes, ears, heart, kidneys, and bones. Alcohol can trigger cell death and disrupt nerve cell growth, causing abnormal development. Alcohol also interferes with blood flow to the placenta, preventing the delivery of nutrients and oxygen to the fetus. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2007) reports that the end result could be mental retardation, learning disabilities, attention deficits, hyperactivity, and problems with impulse control, language, memory, and social skills.

Surgeon General Richard Carmona issued the following advisory in February 2005:

- Pregnant women should not drink alcohol during pregnancy.
- Pregnant women who have already consumed alcohol during her pregnancy should stop in order to minimize further risk.
- Women considering becoming pregnant should abstain from alcohol.
- Since nearly half of all births in the U.S. are unplanned, women of childbearing age should talk to their doctor about ways to reduce the possibility of prenatal alcohol exposure.
- Health professionals should ask routinely about alcohol consumption by women of childbearing age, inform them of the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy, and advise them not to drink alcohol during pregnancy (SAMHSA, 2007).

If a child has been exposed to drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy there is help available. Centre County Early Intervention provides a variety of services including but not limited to vision and hearing services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, special instruction, and service coordination. Children that demonstrate a 25% developmental delay or a condition with a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay such as cerebral palsy, fetal alcohol syndrome, and failure to thrive are eligible to receive services. If you have concerns about the development of your child ages birth to three, contact Centre County Early Intervention at (814) 355-6786 for a free evaluation.

Again, FASD is 100% preventable. There is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. Centre County Drug and Alcohol gives preferential status to pregnant women who are seeking drug and alcohol treatment. Please call (814) 355-6744 for more information.

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