

# SUPPORTING ALCOHOL FREE PREGNANCIES

#FASDAwarenessDay  
#AlcoholAndPregnancy

## What is FASD Awareness Day?

Monday 9th September is International FASD Awareness Day. The date draws attention to the importance of going alcohol-free for the 9 months of pregnancy. This is to prevent a group of disorders called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

FASD is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure and is associated with a range of lifelong physical, mental, educational, social, and behavioural difficulties. **An estimated 4.8% of the children born in Ireland every year are born with FASD, that's 1 child in every 20.** FASD is often called a hidden disorder because most people with it have no visible signs of disability. Symptoms may not be apparent until a child is at school.

On this year's FASD Awareness Day, please help support alcohol free pregnancies.

## How can you help?

- ☐ Share posts on social media channels directing people to the [HSE's webpage](#) with information and advice on alcohol free pregnancies. You can use the image and text below.



**Draft Post copy:** #DidYouKnow today is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day?

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are caused by alcohol passing to the baby through the placenta during pregnancy.

Experts advise an alcohol-free pregnancy to eliminate the risk.

To learn more about planning an alcohol-free pregnancy, visit <https://bit.ly/3L0tqeN>

#AskAboutAlcohol #FASD #FASDAwarenessDay  
#TheRightToKnow

- ☐ Share and display the HSE Alcohol and Pregnancy Poster and Leaflet in health care settings:

[HSE Alcohol and Pregnancy Poster](#)

[HSE Alcohol and Pregnancy Leaflet](#)

You can order hard copies of these resources on [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie).

- ☐ Have conversations with a colleague and people in your community about the importance of supporting alcohol-free pregnancies
- ☐ Listen to and share the HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast episode on alcohol and pregnancy: [Alcohol and Pregnancy: HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast - Episode 22 \(youtube.com\)](#).

## Are you a Healthcare Professional?

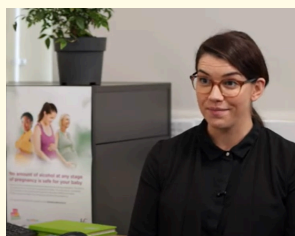
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Women expect healthcare professionals to provide guidance, information and advice on abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy and can be powerfully influenced by this. Women are likely to accept advice that they should not drink alcohol during pregnancy if you discuss this routinely with them in an open, factual, and supportive manner. Pre-conception communication is also important to minimise alcohol exposure prior to women becoming aware that they are pregnant.

- Clearly communicate to women and their partners that the HSE advice is that **no amount of alcohol at any stage of pregnancy is safe for your baby**
- Make it part of your routine practice to ask about alcohol use at every visit pre-conception and during pregnancy
- Use a validated tool such as the [AUDIT-C](#) to assess how much a woman is drinking alcohol and how this has changed since she found out she is pregnant
- Provide advice and support based on the level of risk identified:
  - If drinking small amounts of alcohol at low frequency, advise her and her partner that no amount of alcohol at any stage of pregnancy is safe for their baby. Encourage her to stop drinking altogether in a supportive manner
  - If drinking alcohol at a level of high risk for her health and her baby's health, refer to an Alcohol Liaison Nurse/Midwife or a specialist addiction service. If they are drinking at high levels, they should not stop without medical supervision. If you are not sure about the most appropriate support needed, contact the HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline: telephone 1800 459 459 or email [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie)

--- Provide positive reinforcement if not currently drinking alcohol and encourage her to continue not to drink any alcohol during pregnancy

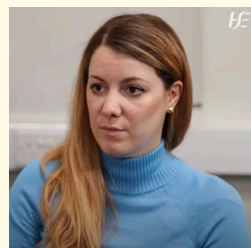
- Document any prenatal alcohol exposure – this is important for any future diagnostic testing
- Update your knowledge and skills on conducting alcohol brief interventions by completing the HSE's [Making Every Contact Count Training](#) and/or the HSE's [SAOR Training in Screening and Brief Intervention for Alcohol and Substance Use](#). E-learning modules in both programmes are available on [www.hseland.ie](http://www.hseland.ie) and skills workshops are also available.
- Watch our videos on alcohol brief interventions during pregnancy (individual links below), this will support you to have these conversations with patients and service users.



[Obstetrician alcohol brief intervention during pregnancy](#)



[GP alcohol brief intervention during pregnancy](#)



[Social worker alcohol brief intervention during pregnancy](#)



[Midwife alcohol brief intervention during pregnancy](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Is there a safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy?

**There is no established safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.** A variety of maternal and fetal factors influence the risks from drinking alcohol when pregnant including metabolism and genetics, making it impossible to predict the level of risk in individuals.

Alcohol crosses the placenta and can result in damage to the brain and other organs at any stage of pregnancy. The risk of harm to the developing fetus increases with increasing amounts and frequency of alcohol consumption.

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## **What are the impacts of alcohol consumption at different stages of pregnancy?**

Prenatal alcohol exposure can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that impacts the brain and body. Different organs and systems of the baby's body may be impacted, depending on the timing of exposure to alcohol.

Alcohol exposure can impact the developing baby at any stage of pregnancy. There are critical periods that are extra sensitive for alcohol-related birth defects. This includes very early in pregnancy (3-8 weeks post-conception), when the embryo undergoes rapid cell division and differentiation to provide the foundations of the body systems. However, the brain develops throughout the whole of pregnancy with risk of neurodevelopmental disorder from prenatal alcohol exposure throughout the whole of pregnancy.

Alcohol consumption at any stage of pregnancy can also result in adverse pregnancy outcomes, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and babies being born prematurely, small for gestational age, or with low birth weight.

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## **How should I talk to people who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy about alcohol?**

Health professionals are a key, trusted source of information about alcohol and pregnancy. Irish research has found that people who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy want health professionals to ask them about their alcohol use, and want clear and accurate information about the risks.

It's important not to assume that a person knows not to drink alcohol during pregnancy, or that they aren't drinking. Research in Ireland shows that up to four in five of first pregnancies are exposed to alcohol. Ireland is therefore estimated to have the third highest prevalence of FASD in the world.

There are many factors that can influence whether someone uses alcohol during pregnancy. It is crucial to avoid judgment, stigma or shame when asking about alcohol use.

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## **What should I say to someone who is concerned because they consumed alcohol before they knew they were pregnant?**

This is a common scenario. It is important to provide reassurance that being alcohol-free from the earliest opportunity in pregnancy is best for the pregnancy and developing baby. You can advise that the risk of harm to the baby is likely to be low following a one-off drinking episode, or if only small amounts of alcohol had been consumed before knowledge of the pregnancy. Provide positive reinforcement to remain alcohol-free during the pregnancy, and to return for support if she finds it hard to stop drinking.

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## **Contact**

*For queries, please contact the HSE Alcohol Programme Project Manager Katie Dunphy at [Katherine.Dunphy@hse.ie](mailto:Katherine.Dunphy@hse.ie)*