

ALCOHOL AWARENESS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

The Need

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy is gambling with a child's life. A few drinks daily can lead to decreased birth-weight and size, growth abnormalities, and behavior problems. As the average daily consumption of alcohol increases, even more serious problems can threaten the unborn child: stillbirth, joint and organ malformations, and mental retardation.

This is a serious problem today because one in six women in peak childbearing years (18 to 34) may drink enough to hurt their unborn babies, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. Consumption rates continue to increase. A marketing study described in Advertising Age magazine predicts that women's expenditures on alcohol will increase to \$30 billion by 1994—a 50 percent increase in ten years.

As much as 90 percent of the public know that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can hurt unborn children, according to a study in the American Journal of Public Health. However, the understanding of the problem is very vague. A third of the women interviewed believed that a pregnant woman could safely consume three drinks a day. Another study showed that only 55 percent of women ages 18 to 34 had heard of fetal alcohol syndrome.

Understanding the Terms

“Fetal alcohol syndrome” (FAS) describes the most extreme effects of alcohol consumption on a newborn. One pregnant woman in three who daily drinks three ounces of alcohol (six mixed drinks or

six beers) gives birth to a child with the full range of FAS effects. Some researchers have found an association between binge drinking (five or more drinks on any one occasion) and FAS.

An FAS child is born at low birth weight, reduced length, an abnormally small head and brain, central nervous system damage, and possible malformations of organs and physical features.

“Fetal alcohol effects” (FAE) describes the damage to children caused by lower levels of drinking during pregnancy. Children with fetal alcohol effects have some but not all of the problems listed above, in a milder form.

Women who drink heavily throughout pregnancy may have children with no signs of fetal alcohol syndrome. Others who drink at low to moderate levels will have babies with alcohol-related damage. For this reason, the safest advice is

not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Studies in France, Sweden, and the United States indicate that one child in 1,000 will be born with FAS. Other studies put the rate at 1 to 2 per 1,000 for the general population and higher for certain groups. In 1993, the Centers for Disease Control estimated that, in the United States, 5,000 children with FAS and 8,000 to 16,000 with FAE are born each year.

Because many of the effects of alcohol damage may not be apparent at birth (mental retardation, behavior problems, poor coordination), some experts believe that fetal alcohol effects are underdiagnosed.

The Challenge

Warnings about not drinking during pregnancy date back as far as Aristotle and the Bible:

Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.
—The Bible, Judges 13:2-3

Organizations like the March of Dimes are issuing an updated version of this message today. Unfortunately, not all the women who need to hear it have. And women react

differently to this message. Some women are casual social drinkers, and learning about the relationship between drinking alcohol, FAS, and FAE will be enough to stop them from drinking during pregnancy.

Others are habitual drinkers or alcohol-dependent. Some will want to stop but have a hard time doing so. Others won't want to stop.

The challenge for Kiwanis clubs is three-fold: to ensure that community efforts to combat fetal damage due to alcohol are well coordinated, to build general awareness, and to provide support to women who want to stop drinking.

Coordinating Efforts

The first step in an alcohol awareness campaign is a meeting with the agencies that are already involved—or would like to get involved—with this issue. This may include the health department, social service providers, organizations that address alcoholism and alcohol problems, members of the medical community (pediatricians, obstetricians, nurses, hospitals, health educators, psychologists, counselors), mental retardation support programs, support programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, rehabilitation centers, the nearest March of Dimes chapter, parents of FAS children, school counselors, and owners of local bars and liquor stores.

The first step for this group may be to study the frequency of FAS and FAE among infants and other age groups in the community. This will indicate the severity of the problem and establish a basis for evaluating the impact of education and intervention efforts. This study should result in a sustained effort to identify newborns with possible FAS/FAE.

With this new information the group should be able to define the target audience of the awareness Campaign—the women who are drinking during pregnancy. The group may also want to explore the potential for setting up a screening program to identify pregnant women with alcohol problems who should be encouraged to seek help to stop drinking.

Building Public Awareness

Events and Gimmicks

Pregnant Women Pour—Organize an event at which women who have just learned they are pregnant (or who are going to start trying to be pregnant) pour away the remains of any liquor they have at home. Stage the event at the hospital where they will deliver their children. Have a representative from a supermarket or dairy present each woman with a quart of milk. Invite newspapers, radio stations, and television

reporters to cover the event. Take pictures so that you can submit them with your press release.

Free Milk for Pregnant Women—Encourage local bars and restaurants that serve alcohol to offer free milk (or fruit juice) to women who are pregnant. Create a poster or table card for bars to use in educating their clientele. Put out a flyer that lists the participating establishments. Communicate the message that they are proud to help pregnant women have healthy babies.

Companies Care Program—Arrange for local experts to talk at employee meetings of companies about the importance of avoiding alcohol during pregnancy. Use representatives from the public health department, March of Dimes, and family and child services departments.

Print

The sample materials in the back of this bulletin and the list of materials available from various organizations provide a range of print, audio, and video materials that your club or coalition can use. Listed below are suggestions on integrating these materials into your campaign.

Pamphlets—Produce or purchase in quantity. Leave at clinics, doctors' offices, high schools, college campuses, the health

department, drug stores, and liquor stores. To print enough to really cover the community, offer to give credit on the pamphlet to a printer who will donate the printing.

Public Service Ads (PSAs)—Take prepared ads to local newspapers and ask them to print them as a public service. Better yet, ask the companies that are major advertisers in the paper to take your PSA in for you.

Press Releases—Send out press releases to every news source in the community to tell what your needs survey discovered—and include information on FAS and FAE.

Op-Ed Pieces—Opposite the editorial page is a page where opinion pieces are printed. Have one of the medical experts in your coalition write an op-ed piece and hand deliver it to the person in charge of the editorial and opinion pages. Explain who wrote the piece and that you personally brought it in to explain your campaign.

Posters—Sponsor a local poster contest (or get the local newspaper or printer to sponsor the contest) for the best poster on not drinking while pregnant. Put up the winning posters at clinics, doctors' offices, and every place liquor is sold.

Radio

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)—Write short announcements that explain the reason why pregnant women shouldn't drink. Design them to be read in 10, 15, 20, and 30 seconds. Take copies to local radio stations and ask that they be read. Or, you can purchase taped PSAs and carry these to local stations. Ask that the station commit to playing the tape at specific times.

Interviews—Persuade the most articulate members of the coalition (a doctor, an expert on mental retardation and alcoholism, an adoptive parent of an FAS child) to agree to be interviewed. Then, contact the news departments or talk show hosts about doing a series of interviews to increase awareness of the dangers of drinking while pregnant.

Call-in Shows—Urge a station with a call-in show aimed at women to use one of the medical experts from your coalition or the caregiver of an FAS child as a featured guest.

Video

Donate Videotapes—Purchase educational videos and donate them to clinics (where they can be played in the waiting room), child birth educators, schools, and libraries.

Cable Broadcasts—Urge the local cable television franchise to run a video about fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects on the local access channel.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)—Visit local stations with a PSA on avoiding alcohol while pregnant. Urge them to dub their own copy from your master and play the PSA regularly.

Interviews—Urge the local news stations' medical reporter or the host of the local video magazine show to interview one of the spokespersons for your coalition.

Services to Pregnant Women

Awareness is not enough. Women need support. Every pregnant woman needs to have prenatal care. Those who are alcohol dependent need support to avoid drinking, and the families of pregnant women who won't face their drinking problem may need assistance to intervene.

Free Prenatal Care—The first step to a healthy pregnancy is to get prenatal care—regular visits to a doctor. Doctors give advice on how to have healthy pregnancies (no alcohol is one piece of advice) and address any health problems that develop. Women who

cannot afford this must have access to free prenatal care.

If a free clinic for prenatal care does not exist in the community, the coalition can develop one, using resources contributed by the members. Several doctors will need to volunteer a few hours each week. A hospital or social service agency can contribute materials and space. Record keeping can be done by volunteers, and your Kiwanis club could provide lights, waiting room furniture, and educational materials.

If a free clinic already is in operation, the club may need to publicize its location and hours or offer transportation to it.

Telephone Help Line—A telephone help line for pregnant women can answer all kinds of questions, meanwhile promoting healthy pregnancies. Besides giving advice on proper nutrition and the dangers of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs, the help line can provide moral support to women who have a difficult time avoiding alcohol. Volunteers will need to be trained to give standard advice, and a counselor (who can help in a crisis) should always be on call. The help line can also connect women to the free clinic or to counseling resources.

Resource Sheet—Create a resource sheet of counseling and therapy programs available to women who need assistance to

stop drinking. This listing should include programs that can help a family assist a woman who denies her problem.

Home Visitation Program—Women are most likely to learn from and follow the advice of someone like themselves. That is why the home visitation and resource mother programs are so successful. These programs train volunteers from the neighborhood to visit pregnant women and make sure they're doing the right things to ensure a healthy pregnancy. As trust develops, the home visitor can help the expectant mother negotiate the complexities of the health care system or secure financial assistance. The Cooperative Extension Service has "Mentor Mother" programs in some states, and some public health departments have outreach mothers programs. For more information on these programs, request service bulletin PO #17, "Home Visitation Programs" from the Kiwanis International Office and contact the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality for additional materials.

Instructions

For each of these samples, retype the text double-spaced and with appropriate margins (2" for the radio scripts; 1" for the others). Make copies of the radio PSA and distribute them to local radio stations. Develop and distribute your own press release using a format similar to the sample. Submit the op-ed piece to your local newspaper editor and ask that it appear as an op-ed piece or letter to the editor.

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

For more information, contact:

Kiwanis Club of Milkwood
Dylan Thomas
555-4356

"Alcohol is killing and maiming our babies," says pediatrician Shirley Handel, spokesperson for the Priority One Committee of Milkwood. Six children born in Milkwood County over the past 12 months have birth defects that were caused by their mothers' consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, according to Dr. Handel. And alcohol consumption was linked to three pregnancies that did not come to term.

All of these problems were preventable, according to a report written by the Priority One Committee and presented by Dr. Handel. "Alcohol cannot cause birth defects if pregnant women don't drink it," says Dr. Handel.

Women in Milkwood County need to be better educated about drinking alcohol during pregnancy, notes the report. That is why it recommends development of an education and outreach campaign to alert all women of childbearing age that alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy.

"Anyone who wants to help in this campaign should come to the Committee's next meeting," urges Dr. Handel. It will meet at Wales Memorial Hospital on Tuesday, November 8, at 7:00 pm. The committee includes representatives from the Milkwood Kiwanis club; March of Dimes; Alcoholics Anonymous; Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies; Obstetrics and Pediatrics Depts. of Milkwood Hospital; and Milkwood Counseling.

Nationally, one child in 750 is born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and more are born with Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE). FAS is a set of birth defects that includes growth deficiency, facial malformations, central nervous system damage, and other defects. Children with FAE are also born with some of these problems. All of these defects are caused by women drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The Kiwanis Club of Milkwood developed this project as part of its Young Children: Priority One efforts that address the needs of young children, prenatal through age five.

Radio Public Service Announcement

Radio Public Service Announcements

10 seconds

Drinking while pregnant can damage your unborn baby. Play it safe. Don't drink while you're pregnant.

A message from this station and the Milkwood Kiwanis club.

10 seconds

If you're pregnant and you drink alcohol, you're gambling with the life and health of your unborn child. So, drink for your baby. Have milk or juice.

A message from this station and the Milkwood Healthy Baby Committee.

15 seconds

You wouldn't give your newborn baby a beer. But while you're pregnant, any alcohol you drink reaches your baby a minute after you swallow. So don't swallow any at all.

A message from this station and the Kiwanis Club of Milkwood.

20 seconds

Imagine a ten-year-old child the size of a six-year-old. Imagine that she has an IQ of 65. Imagine that she's your child. Now, imagine someone asking, "Why did you drink before she was born?"

If you're pregnant, don't drink alcohol.

A message from this station and the Alcohol-Free Babies Committee.

30 seconds

If you're pregnant and you drink alcohol, so does your unborn child. But your baby's body isn't old enough to cope. A drink or two each day could mean lower birthweight or growth problems for your baby. And enough alcohol to give you a hangover could leave him mentally retarded. So, remember, every drink is for both of you. And your baby's way too young to start.

A message from this station and the Kiwanis Club of Milkwood.

The Importance of Alcohol Awareness for Pregnant Women

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) are the terms used to describe a combination of physical and mental birth defects that may develop when expectant mothers drink excessive amounts of alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol is one of the few known causes of birth defects that produce mental retardation. It is certainly the most preventable.

Babies born with FAS or FAE are abnormally small at birth and usually do not catch up as they get older. In most cases they have small, widely spaced eyes, a short, upturned nose, and small, flat cheeks. They may suffer from a variety of organ malformations, particularly of the heart. Most babies with FAS/FAE have small brains and some degree of mental retardation. Many are poorly coordinated, have short attention spans, and exhibit behavioral problems.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome was first identified in 1973. Cases of FAS have now been reported in most countries and among all socio-economic groups. In the United States, one out of every 750 newborns—about 5,000 babies per year—have FAS. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that, in the United States, 10,000 newborns each year may be affected by FAE.

Researchers don't know how alcohol causes damage to the fetus. They do know that alcohol passes directly through the placenta to a fetus soon after being consumed by the mother. A baby gets as much alcohol as a mother drinks. However, because an unborn baby's liver is immature, it cannot break down the alcohol. It remains in the child's system until it can move back into the mother's bloodstream to be oxidized. As a result, the alcohol level in the fetus's blood actually can be higher than in the mother's blood.

How much is too much? Women who drink the equivalent of three ounces of pure alcohol each day (six mixed drinks or six cans of beer) frequently give birth to babies who have the full range of FAS. Moderate amounts of alcohol during pregnancy (two to five drinks daily) also can cause FAE.. Because some women who drink heavily throughout pregnancy have children with no signs of FAS but others who drink sparingly have babies with FAE, the safest advice is not to drink any alcohol during pregnancy.

Drinking alcohol can also increase the risk of other problems. Heavy drinkers are two to four times more likely to have a miscarriage between the fourth and sixth months of pregnancy. Heavy drinkers are also two to three times more likely to lose their babies during the perinatal period.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is completely preventable if a pregnant woman does not drink. Women planning a pregnancy should stop consuming alcohol before attempting to conceive and should abstain throughout pregnancy and nursing. Women who drink and have unplanned pregnancies should abstain as soon as they suspect they are pregnant. Heavy drinkers should avoid pregnancy until they are certain that they can abstain from alcohol for the entire term from conception to birth.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

The following organizations have educational materials on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and/or Fetal Alcohol Effects. Please contact one or all of these organizations for additional information

AIMS MultiMedia

9710 DeSoto Avenue
Chatsworth, CA 91311-4409
(800) 367-2467
www.aimsmultimedia.com

Videos

The Association for Retarded Citizens

The ARC of the U.S.
1010 Wayne Avenue
Ste. 650
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301/565-3842
Fax: 301/565-3843
www.thearc.org/
pubtemp.htm

*Brochures, printed materials,
FAS kits, videos*

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

Materials and Supply
Division
1275 Mamaroneck Ave.
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 428-7100
www.marchofdimes.com

Pamphlets, fact sheet, videos

Milner-Fenwick, Inc.

2125 Greenspring Drive
Timonium, MD 21093
(301) 252-1700
(800) 638-8652
Fax: 410/252-6316

Videos

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

11426 Rockville Pike
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 468-2600
(800) 729-6686
www.health.org
www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

*Pamphlets, fact sheets,
videos, posters*

National Health Information Center

Referral Specialist
PO Box 1133
Washington, DC 20013
Phone: 301/565-4167
800/336-4797
Fax: 301/984-4256

*Videos, posters, t-shirts,
books, bumper stickers,
brochures*

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS)

900 17th Street NW
Ste. 910
Washington, DC 20006
202/785-4585
1-800-66NOFAS
Fax: 202/466-6456
www.nofas.org

Books, brochures, videos

Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources

1552 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53726-4085
-or-

P.O. Box 1468
Madison, WI 53701-1468
608/262-9157
800/248-9244
Fax: 608/262-6346
www.wch.uhs.wis.edu
www.dhfs.state.wi.us
www.wisc.edu

Brochures, pamphlets, fact sheets.



Serving the
Children
of the World



Service Programs Department
Kiwaniis International
3636 Woodview Trace
Indianapolis, IN 46268-3196

(317) 875-8755 Worldwide
(800) 879-4769 North America
(317) 879-0204 Fax

Email: service@kiwanis.org

Remember, it doesn't matter if it's beer, wine, or a mixed drink. It's still alcohol, and alcohol hurts sometimes kills children. Please don't drink if you're pregnant.



**Avoid
Alcohol
While you're
Pregnant!**



**For more information,
contact:**

National Organization
on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
900 17th Street NW
Ste. 910
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 785-4585
1-800-66NOFAS
www.nofas.org

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation
1275 Mamaroneck Ave.
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 428-7100
www.marchofdimes.com

*Distributed by your local Kiwanis club as part of the
Kiwanis International service program
Young Children: Priority One.*



Service Programs Department
Kiwanis International
3636 Woodview Trace
Indianapolis, IN 46268-3196
(317) 875-8755

**DON'T
GAMBLE
WITH YOUR
CHILD'S
FUTURE**

You Share Your Drinks

If you're pregnant, you share all the alcohol you drink with your unborn baby. And your baby's body isn't old enough to cope.

Just a few drinks a week have caused miscarriages and stillbirths.

Other developing babies cope with one or two drinks on a regular basis. But they may be born underweight, undersize, with behavior problems. These are **Fetal Alcohol Effects**.

And some unborn babies regularly have to face four or five drinks at a time. They may be born with additional problems:

- small heads
- facial malformations
- nervous system problems
- heart, kidney, and joint defects

These problems are called **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**.

Mental retardation, growth deficiency, poor coordination, and behavior problems will be their legacy as they get older.



Stop Now!

If you even think you might be pregnant, don't drink!

If you have been drinking, please stop!
You can still help your baby.

Doctors don't know why the effects of a mother's drinking vary from baby to baby. They do know that the more you drink, the more you're gambling with your baby's life.

Stay Dry with the Baby

As long as you nurse your baby, stay away from drinking. Because the alcohol you drink will end up in your milk.

In countries around the world, among the rich and the poor anywhere humans

consume alcohol there are children born damaged by alcohol.

Studies in three countries indicate that as many as 1 in 1,000 infants is born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Up to 10 times that number are born with Fetal Alcohol Effects.

In the United States alone, the annual treatment costs for everyone with FAS infants, children, and adults was estimated to be more than \$1.4 billion in 1980. Estimated productivity losses were another half billion dollars.

The institutional and medical costs for one child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome are estimated to be \$1.4 million over a lifetime.

More shocking than all of these statistics is one encounter with a child who is half the size he should be and has a small head, flattened face, and only one ear. An IQ of 65.

Imagine that boy. Then, remember that he would be normal if his mother had avoided alcohol.