

Health Unit Media Release

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Alcohol and Pregnancy Don't Mix

(July 14, 2006 Brockville) -- Prenatal exposure to alcohol is the leading known cause of preventable brain damage in Canada. The Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit wants women of childbearing age and their families to have an increased awareness of the dangers of drinking alcohol while pregnant. In fact, it is safest to stop drinking alcohol before pregnancy.

One in 100 births are affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol. There are approximately 3,000 babies born each year in Canada that have been exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause **permanent** brain damage and birth defects to a baby.

Prenatal exposure to alcohol can also cause:

- Vision and hearing difficulties
- Bones, limbs and fingers that are not properly formed
- Damage to heart, kidney, liver and other organs
- Slow growth

Brain damage caused as a result of prenatal exposure to alcohol can result in learning disabilities, hyperactivity, and difficulties with:

- Paying attention,
- Remembering,
- Managing anger,
- Decision making
- and problem solving.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the umbrella term used to describe the range of defects and disabilities that are caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong problem that the child will not outgrow.** FASD occurs in all cultures and levels of society.

78% of female Canadians aged 15-44 report consuming alcohol in the past twelve months.
58% of Canadian women report at least one episode of binge drinking in the past twelve months.
15 to 25% will continue to drink alcohol when pregnant.

Alcohol consumption may continue during pregnancy because:

- Some women may not know it is harmful
- Some women drink because of life's problems
- Some women drink because it is a social norm
- Some women drink to self medicate for depression

"Alcohol is a part of so many of our society's functions, that pregnant women often face pressures to drink," says Denise Kall, Public Health Nurse. "It is important for all family and community members to support a pregnant woman in her decision not to drink alcohol."

For more information on alcohol and pregnancy, contact the **Health Action line: 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685** or visit www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca

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