

Midwives promote alcohol-free pregnancies

New resources to support midwives being rolled out nationally for international FASD day

September is
FASD
AWARENESS
— MONTH —

For immediate release

7 September 2022 – Midwives across the UK are holding special events on 9 September to raise awareness of the risks of alcohol in pregnancy, using a new expert-reviewed midwives toolkit developed by The National Organisation for FASD. They join with advocacy groups across the UK and all around the world who on 9/9 International FASD day focus attention on the health benefits for mother and baby of avoiding alcohol in pregnancy and the need to diagnose as well as support those with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that can result from alcohol-exposed pregnancies.

“This is an exciting year,” said Sandra Butcher, Chief Executive of National FASD. “All major public health bodies have now lined up to call for local areas to ramp up FASD prevention, diagnosis and support. Midwives have a special role to play in supporting healthy pregnancies by explaining the health benefits of avoiding alcohol if pregnant or trying to conceive.” Midwives in Barnsely, Doncaster, Stockport, Coventry, Sheffield, Oldham, Ormskirk, Birmingham, Leeds, Barry, Wirral, Portsmouth, Manchester, Brighton, Tooting and Dukinfield and other locations are taking part in 9/9 events.

“The great thing about this tool kit is, it gives community midwives the skills and support to discuss alcohol in a non-judgemental arena. But more importantly, gives women the opportunity to receive great information to support better choices in pregnancy” said Laney Holland, Substance and Alcohol Misuse Specialist Midwife

“Midwives are at the heart of the battle against more children growing up with effects of FASD. They must be supported and be given the time and training to be able to have conversations with Mothers about this issue and in being able to offer advice and support when needed. FASD is preventable” said Debbie Reid, Specialist Midwife.

FASD day is part of an FASD Awareness Month in the UK. Throughout the month, independent groups that comprise the FASD UK Alliance will be creating activities and actions encouraging members of their communities, policy makers, commissioners, practitioners, educators, social workers and individuals and families to pledge some action during the month to contribute to progress in either FASD prevention or diagnosis and support.

This is a particularly important year in the UK following policy statements by all major public health bodies alerting policy makers and practitioners to put in place measures to help prevent FASD and support those who have it and a recent prevalence study by the University of Salford which said that 2-4% of the population is likely to have FASD, a rate

higher than autism, but most of these people are unrecognised, undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

Joanna Buckard, Innovation Director at National FASD who has trained thousands of midwives said, “Our new toolkit is designed to fill a resource gap nationally. We know local areas need posters and pamphlets for pregnant people and tools and training for midwives to help them understand the latest public health guidance and to give them confidence in these life-changing discussions. Today we are releasing the first of our materials, and later we will release a free e-learning module for all midwives, pharmacists and sexual health practitioners.”

National FASD is sponsoring a [month of action](#) for September FASD Awareness Month, with a wide range of activities for people with FASD, their families, supporters and practitioners to encourage wider awareness of FASD and the risks of alcohol in pregnancy.

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New alcohol in pregnancy leaflet and posters available for midwives, GPs, and other healthcare professionals

What do experts advise?

Since 2016, the Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) guidance is that:

- If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum
- Drinking in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to the baby, with the more you drink the greater the risk

This is in agreement with experts' advice internationally.



Why should I avoid alcohol when pregnant or planning a pregnancy

- ✓ you will reduce the risk of infertility
- ✓ you will reduce the risk of miscarriage
- ✓ you will reduce the risk of stillbirth
- ✓ your baby is less likely to be born prematurely
- ✓ your baby is less likely to be born with a low birth weight
- ✓ you will reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) formerly known as 'cot death'
- ✓ you will ensure your baby will not have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?

FASD results when prenatal alcohol exposure affects the developing brain and body. FASD is a spectrum. Each person with FASD is affected differently. While more than 400 conditions can co-occur, FASD is at its core a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. All people with FASD have many strengths. Early diagnosis and appropriate support are essential, especially for executive functioning.

(Source: FASD: Preferred UK Language Guide, Seashell Trust/National FASD, 2020).

Why am I being asked about alcohol?

The new NICE quality standard on FASD states midwives and other professionals should give information about the risk of alcohol harm during pregnancy, that they ask about alcohol-use in pregnancy and that this information is recorded.

You can give permission for this to be included in your child's records which may aid future diagnosis or support if needed.

Scan here to find out more



NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR FASD
nationalFASD.org.uk

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Alcohol & Pregnancy

What you need to know

NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR FASD

How does alcohol cause a problem in pregnancy?

Alcohol passes through the placenta and remains in the amniotic fluid for a while afterwards, so even after you have stopped drinking, your baby could still be affected. This is because the baby has not yet developed the ability to process the alcohol.

Alcohol is toxic and can affect the way the baby's brain and body develop leading to lifelong disability.

I'm pregnant and I've had some drinks, what now?

The Chief Medical Officers advise, 'If you find out you are pregnant after you have drunk alcohol during early pregnancy, you should avoid further drinking. You should be aware that it is unlikely in most cases that your baby has been affected'. Stopping drinking altogether is safest for your baby. However, if you are a regular and heavy drinker it may be unsafe for you to stop suddenly. If you are concerned that you may be drinking dependently, it is important that you speak to your GP or midwife or contact your local specialist service for advice before you try to reduce or stop your drinking.

If you're worried about having drunk alcohol during pregnancy, or you need support to stop drinking, talk to your doctor or midwife. Ask for a referral to the local substance misuse service for detox/reduction support.

What's the effect on the baby?

The baby develops throughout the entire pregnancy and alcohol use can cause physical conditions such as heart defects or bone malformation (there are more than 400 conditions that can co-occur with FASD). However, everyone with FASD will have damage to their brain and the rest of their central nervous system which is very sensitive to alcohol exposure in pregnancy.

Alcohol causes by far the most neuro-behavioural effects to a developing baby than other substances such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin (BMA, 2016).

If you do not drink your baby cannot have FASD, it is only caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy.



Will every baby exposed to alcohol get FASD?

There is currently no way to predict which babies will be affected by the alcohol and which will not. This is why experts agree that no alcohol during pregnancy is safest, as it avoids any risk of the baby having FASD.

How could I tell if my child has FASD?

If your pregnancy was alcohol-exposed, it's important that you know the signs to look out for so early diagnosis and support can be put in place. In the vast majority of cases you cannot tell at birth if a child has FASD. In a small minority of cases there may be specific facial features. Difficulties may present during childhood or adolescence. Some may have developmental delays but others will struggle with some or all of the following:

- Learning
- Memory
- Motor development
- Social relationships
- Emotional regulation
- Attention
- Impulsivity
- Hyperactivity



If you are concerned about your child's development speak to your GP and ask for a referral for an FASD assessment.

People with FASD can and do have happy fulfilled lives.

Early diagnosis and support are key to successful outcomes and strategies for other conditions are often ineffective.

Drinking alcohol in pregnancy?



Help is available
Stopping drinking altogether is safest for your baby

If you are a regular or heavy drinker it may be unsafe for you to stop suddenly – speak to your health care provider

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

Alcohol & Pregnancy #WhyRiskIt NATIONAL FASD

pregnant?



Your choices matter

FACT 1 Alcohol is more damaging to a developing baby than heroin

Scan here for more alcohol in pregnancy facts and speak to your healthcare provider for advice and support

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

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Trying for a baby?



Did you know the expert advice is to avoid alcohol?

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CHOOSING AN ALCOHOL-FREE PREGNANCY?

GREAT
This is the safest choice for your baby



Even small amounts of alcohol in pregnancy can cause lifelong harm to your baby

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Alcohol & Pregnancy #WhyRiskIt NATIONAL FASD

I can't process alcohol and it can harm my development forever



Alcohol crosses the placenta and also remains in the amniotic fluid

Experts advise there is no known safe amount of alcohol in pregnancy

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

Alcohol & Pregnancy #WhyRiskIt NATIONAL FASD

Background information

What is FASD?

“FASD results when prenatal alcohol exposure affects the developing brain and body. FASD is a spectrum. Each person with FASD is affected differently. While more than [400 conditions can co-occur](#), FASD is at its core a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. All people with FASD have many strengths. Early diagnosis and appropriate support are essential, especially for executive functioning.” (Source: [FASD: Preferred UK Language Guide](#), Seashell Trust/National FASD, 2020)

How many people have FASD?

A recent [gold-standard study](#) by the University of Salford showed that 2-4% have FASD. That’s a higher rate than autism. Most people with FASD are unrecognised, undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

How is FASD diagnosed?

The [SIGN 156](#) guideline is the guidance now across Scotland, England and Wales. It says that to have a diagnosis you need to have “Pervasive and long-standing brain dysfunction, which is defined by severe impairment...in three or more of the following neurodevelopmental areas of assessment”: motor skills; cognition; memory; neuroanatomy/ neurophysiology; academic achievement; language; attention; executive function, including impulse control and hyperactivity; affect regulation; or adaptive behaviour, social skills or social communication.

Alcohol in pregnancy in the UK

Over [40% of women](#) in the UK use alcohol during pregnancy, making the UK the [4th highest rate](#) of alcohol exposed pregnancies in the world.

What is the new NICE Quality Standard?

[NICE Quality Standard 204](#) identifies areas for improving quality of care re FASD: advice on avoiding alcohol in pregnancy; prenatal alcohol exposure; referral for assessment; neurodevelopmental assessment; and management plan. Unlike guidance, local areas in England and Wales have to ‘have regard’ for Quality Standards and report on progress in improving care.

What is FASD awareness month?

The 9th day of the 9th month is International FASD Day. This is to draw attention to the importance of going alcohol-free for the 9 months of pregnancy. In the UK we celebrate September FASD Awareness Month. The National Organisation for FASD is providing resources for a [month of action](#) in 2022.

What is the FASD UK Alliance and #FASDUKpledge?

The [FASD UK Alliance](#) is a coalition of groups and individuals from across the UK who are united together for positive social change for those affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Affiliates include small local, regional and virtual groups as well as some of the country’s longest standing national organisations devoted to FASD, with links to international networks. The independent groups that comprise the FASD UK Alliance are all asking people throughout the month to pledge to do more to help raise awareness of FASD. All sister organisations in the Alliance will use hashtags: #FASDmonthUK and #FASDUKpledge

Key official quotes

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“There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. NICE, [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Quality Standard 204](#) (2022).

“Drinking any alcohol can cause difficulties in pregnancy and can result in Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), causing lifelong disabilities for children. There is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.” Public Health England, “[Maternity high impact area: Reducing the incidence of harms caused by alcohol in pregnancy](#)” (2020)

“There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption in pregnancy. Even low to moderate levels of PAE [prenatal alcohol exposure] can negatively impact a fetus and these adverse consequences can persist into adulthood.” SIGN 156, “[Children and Young People Prenatally Exposed to Alcohol](#)” (2019)

“The government recognises the importance of FASD.” Department of Health and Social Care, “[FASD Health Needs Assessment for England](#)” (2021)

“There is no ‘mild’ FASD.” “[FASD Health Needs Assessment for England](#)” (2021)

“Prenatal alcohol exposure should be actively considered as a possible underlying cause for neurodevelopmental delay.” SIGN 156, “[Children and Young People Prenatally Exposed to Alcohol](#)” (2019)

“The needs identified for this population group focus on: a lack of robust prevalence estimates in England; the importance of multi-sector working to support individuals through the life course; better training and awareness for health professionals; better organisation of services to improve accessibility; a need to develop innovative approaches to support those living with the condition.” “[FASD Health Needs Assessment for England](#)” (2021)

“[W. Sussex] appears to be gatekeeping access to its services ... The council has a duty to ensure there is sufficient educational provision available in its area to meet demand. The lack of suitable placements for the boy in the council’s SEN schools suggests it is not meeting this duty.” [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman ruling](#) (2021) that a local area couldn’t exclude someone with FASD from services for those with ‘autism and learning disability.’

“No specific public health messaging on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) has been undertaken in the last five years.” Maggie Throup, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Care, [Hansard, 21 Sept 2021](#) (Note this coincides with the 2016 release of the CMOs’ guidance)

“If you are pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.” [Chief Medical Officers guidance](#) (2016)

“The Government take alcohol concerns, across the board, very seriously and even more so when they relate to pregnancy. We are making progress—I hope—to prevent future FASD cases, and trying to change the landscape on prevention and treatment for those affected. But there is not an ounce of complacency in us—there certainly is not in me. We will continue to work towards improvements in the area.” Steve Brine, then Health Minister, [Hansard, 17 Jan 2019](#)