

Developmental Disabilities and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in Arizona

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Background: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), is an umbrella term that includes the entire range of defects caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. FASD includes Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD) and (Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND).

Prenatal alcohol exposure increases risk of miscarriage, prematurity, stillbirth, sudden infant death syndrome and developmental disabilities ranging from learning and behavior disorders to mental retardation.

Of women who stop drinking when they find out they are pregnant, many have already exposed their babies to serious risk. Of women who continue drinking during pregnancy, most cannot stop drinking even when they want to, and not one mother intends to cause harm her baby.

- **Alcohol exposure before birth is the leading preventable cause of developmental disabilities.** [National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, MMWR December 24, 2004 / 53(50);1178-1181]
- **Half of all pregnancies are exposed to alcohol during the first month. 23% of all pregnancies are exposed to alcohol during the first trimester. 12.4% of pregnant women in Arizona engages in binge drinking at some time during pregnancy.** [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey, 2002]
- **It is estimated that 50,000 individuals in Arizona have FASD, and approximately 7,000 of these individuals have developmental disabilities directly caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.** [Dr. Larry Burd, Online Clinic FAS Cost and Incidence Calculator, 2002. <http://www.online-clinic.com>]
- **Of individuals with FASD, 90% need support services, but only 16% qualify for services in the developmental disabilities system.** [Streissguth studies on secondary disabilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996]
- **FASD costs Arizona taxpayers \$98 million every year. A prevention program costing \$500,000 that saved just one child from FAS would be cost effective.** [H. Harwood, FASD Center for Excellence trainers conference, Orlando, 2005]
- **"Of all the substances of abuse, including heroin, cocaine, and marijuana, alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioral effects in the fetus."** [Institute of Medicine 1996 Report to Congress]
- **"Children with FAS often develop behavior problems that increase their risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system."** [NIAAA report "Strategic Plan To Address Health Disparities," February 8, 2001]

Think about this! There are over 50,000 individuals in Arizona who may have FASD. With the combined factors of poor judgment, lack of impulse control, immaturity, and high risk of substance abuse, they present the highest risk group of becoming the parents of the next generation of alcohol exposed babies. **Prevention efforts in Arizona need to focus on parents raising children with FASD (birth mothers in need of more effective treatment programs and foster/adoptive families needing intervention strategies and services).**



For more information, visit the
FAS Community Resource Center
www.fasarizona.com