What is fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)?

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is a range of effects that can occur when a fetus is prenatally exposed to alcohol.

- These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.

FASD is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. Alcohol is a teratogen that can cross the placenta, resulting in injury to the brain and other organs of the fetus.

Prevalence of FASD/PAE

Because 1 in 10 people report alcohol use during pregnancy, it is estimated that around 6,500 to 7,000 babies are born in Minnesota each year with prenatal alcohol exposure.

A major study in 2018 found that up to 1 in 20 children has an FASD.

In the United States, FAS is more common than spina bifida, anencephaly, and trisomy 18.
Approximately 40,000 babies are born with FASD each year in the United States.

Around 119,000 children are born with FAS every year.


Financial Cost of FASD

In the most recent studies conducted in the United States, it has been estimated that FASD costs the U.S. between $1.6 and $5.4 billion each year.

• These costs include developmental disability services, special education, social service costs, adult vocational services, and institutional care.


Children with FAS incur medical expenditures that are nine times higher than those without FAS.


Drinking & Pregnancy

In the United States, 1 in 10 (10%) people report drinking alcohol while pregnant.

• 33% of individuals who used alcohol during pregnancy reported binge drinking.

• Among pregnant individuals, the highest estimates of reported alcohol use were among those who were:
  o Ages 35-44 (18.6%)
  o College graduates (13%)
  o Employed (12%)


1 in 5 pregnant people in Minnesota did not receive any message about alcohol use from their doctor, or they were told they could drink lightly or in moderation.


Pregnant individuals who received alcohol screening and brief interventions at a social service agency were 5x more likely to abstain from alcohol during the remainder of their pregnancy and delivered infants who were healthier.


Planned Pregnancies

45% of pregnancies in the United States are unintended.

In Minnesota, 40% of pregnancies are unintended.

Couples who do not use contraception have an 85% chance of experiencing a pregnancy within one year.

An individual might not know they are pregnant until 4-6 weeks after conception. By this time, they may have unintentionally exposed the developing baby to alcohol.
