

# Why do people drink alcohol

## during pregnancy?

**PR%F**  
Alliance

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) are caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. FASD can be prevented by not drinking any alcohol throughout the entire duration of pregnancy. That said, drinking during pregnancy is a complex public health issue, and many factors may lead to an alcohol-exposed pregnancy:



### Drinking alcohol before a pregnancy was known

Most people limit or quit drinking alcohol when planning to become pregnant.<sup>1</sup> However, 40% of pregnancies in Minnesota are unplanned.<sup>2</sup> The majority of women ages 18-44 in Minnesota (58%) drink alcohol, and this can result in prenatal alcohol exposure before a person even knows they are pregnant.<sup>3</sup>



### Unaware of the risks

Some people might not be aware of the long-term effects that prenatal alcohol exposure can have. Prenatal alcohol exposure can cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD). Children with an FASD have higher rates of mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities.<sup>4</sup>



### Received inaccurate information

In Minnesota, 1 in 5 women report either not receiving any message about alcohol use from their doctor or being told they could drink lightly or in moderation.<sup>5</sup>



### Knew someone who drank while pregnant

Over 1 in 9 pregnancies are exposed to alcohol.<sup>6</sup> If someone has a friend who drank alcohol during pregnancy but their child doesn't have an FASD diagnosis, they might assume that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is safe and choose to drink throughout their own pregnancy. However, every pregnancy is different and there are many variables that impact how prenatal alcohol exposure will affect fetal development.



### Drinking alcohol is a socially acceptable norm

Alcohol use is generally socially acceptable in the United States, including Minnesota. Minnesotans report greater alcohol use and binge drinking than the national average, and 58% of Minnesotan women in their childbearing years report any alcohol use.<sup>7,3</sup>



### Having an alcohol use disorder

Pregnant people represent 4% of substance use disorder treatment admissions.<sup>8</sup> For those who need additional support in order to have an alcohol-free pregnancy, resources are available, but there may be barriers to access them. One major barrier is the stigma surrounding alcohol use during pregnancy. Feeling ashamed or judged for their drinking can prevent people from seeking help and support.<sup>9</sup>

#### Sources:

1. Hetteema J, Cockrell S, Ingersoll K, et al. Missed Opportunities: Screening and Brief Intervention for Risky Alcohol Use in Women's Health Settings. *Journal of Women's Health*. 2015;24(8):648-654.
2. Guttmacher Institute. State Facts About Unintended Pregnancy: Minnesota. [https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/factsheet/mn\\_17.pdf](https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/factsheet/mn_17.pdf)
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Alcohol Consumption Among Women for 2015. [https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/monitor\\_table.html](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/monitor_table.html)
4. Weyrauch D, Schwartz M, Hart B, Klug M, and Burd L. Comorbid Mental Disorders in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*. 2017; 38(4):283-291.
5. Wilder Research. Alcohol Use and Pregnancy: The Beliefs and Behaviors of Minnesota Women. Published 2013.
6. Denny CH, et al. Consumption of alcohol beverages and binge drinking among pregnant women aged 18-44 years -- United States, 2015-2017. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*. 2019;68(16):365-368.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Alcohol and Public Health: Data and Maps. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/data-stats.htm>
8. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Table 2.10: Admissions aged 12 and older, by marital status, living arrangements, pregnancy status, and veteran status according to primary substance of abuse: 2010. <https://archive.samhsa.gov/data/2k12/TEDS2010N/TEDS2010NTb12.10.htm>
9. Healthy Child Manitoba. Who Drinks Alcohol During Pregnancy? [http://manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd/whywomenandgirlsdrink\\_more.pdf](http://manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd/whywomenandgirlsdrink_more.pdf)