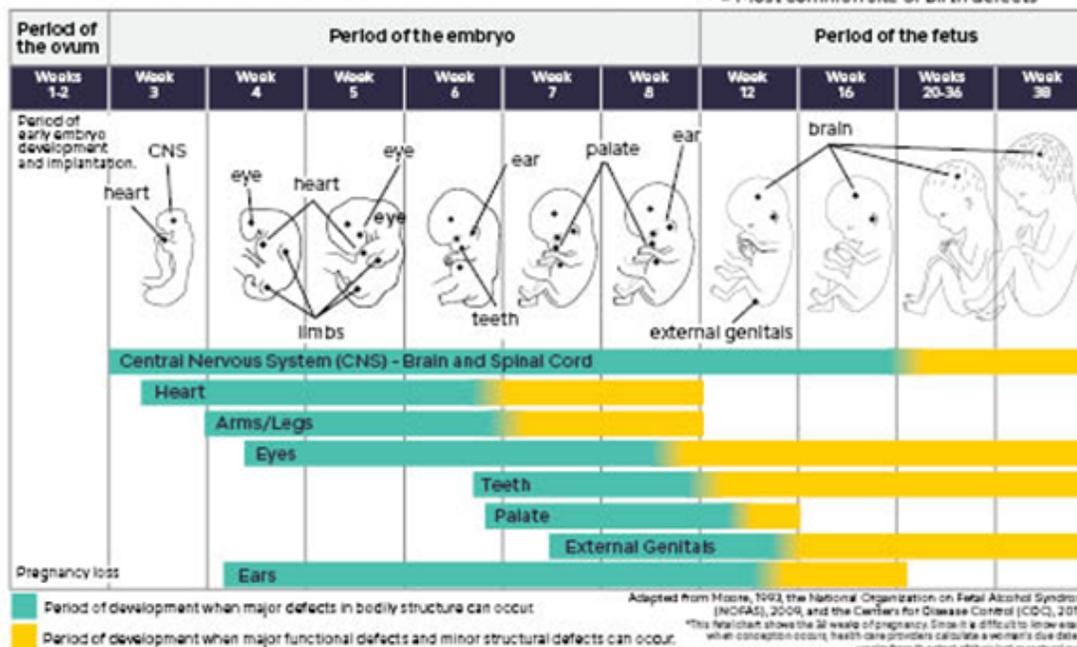


# How Does Alcohol Effect Pregnancy?

## Fetal Development Chart

This chart shows vulnerability of the fetus to defects throughout 38 weeks of pregnancy.\*  
\* = Most common site of birth defects



Alcohol is a teratogen.<sup>2</sup> A teratogen is something that causes birth defects. For example, tobacco, lead and alcohol are all teratogens. Drinking during pregnancy can have serious effects on how the fetus develops. It can harm different organs, and it is especially harmful to the brain.<sup>3</sup> The brain is developing throughout the entire pregnancy.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, drinking alcohol during any trimester can cause brain injury.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup> It can also cause microcephaly, which is when the head and brain are much smaller than expected.<sup>9, 10</sup> These effects to the brain can lead to mild to severe disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

People with prenatal alcohol exposure may have trouble with things like:

- attention
- behavior
- learning
- language
- memory<sup>12</sup>

Drinking during pregnancy can also cause:

- heart problems<sup>13</sup>
- increased risk of infections<sup>14</sup>
- difficulty with movement<sup>15</sup>
- other health issues

Any amount of alcohol, even if it's just one glass of wine, passes from the mother to the fetus.<sup>16</sup> All major health groups state that there is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy.

These health groups include:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC)<sup>17</sup>
- American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>18</sup>
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)<sup>19</sup>
- U.S. Surgeon General<sup>20</sup>

There is no safe time to drink during pregnancy. Drinking during any of the 3 trimesters can affect the fetus. It makes no difference if the alcohol is wine, beer, or hard liquor (like vodka or rum).<sup>21</sup>

There can be different effects to the fetus depending on when the drinking happens. Some of these effects (but not all of them) are shared below.

1ST TRIMESTER	2ND TRIMESTER	3RD TRIMESTER
Major effects on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brain</li><li>• Spinal cord</li><li>• Heart</li><li>• Face</li></ul>	Major effects on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brain</li><li>• Spinal cord</li><li>• Immune system</li></ul>	Major effects on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brain</li><li>• Spinal cord</li><li>• Bones</li></ul>
12 times more likely to have FASD if drinking happens during the 1st trimester	61 times more likely to have FASD if drinking happened in both the 1st and 2nd trimesters	65 times more likely to have FASD if drinking happened during all 3 trimesters

Chart sources: 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34

### Everyone plays a role in preventing FASD:

- If you can become pregnant, talk with your care provider about preventing an alcohol exposed pregnancy.
- If you are a health care provider, take every opportunity to have conversations with patients about alcohol use before and during pregnancy.
- Become an advocate for change as it relates to alcohol policies in your community and state.
- Learn more about FASD and how you can support those impacted by this disorder at [proofalliance.org](http://proofalliance.org).



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