

FASD | WATERLOO REGION

For immediate release

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Drinking in Pregnancy - No Safe Time, No Safe Amount

September 9th is FASD Day - We remind everyone that there is ***no safe time, no safe amount and no safe kind*** of alcohol consumption in pregnancy.

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol it crosses the placenta and it can affect the developing brain and organs of the unborn baby throughout pregnancy. Brain damage is the biggest risk to the unborn baby when mothers drink in pregnancy.

If you are trying to get pregnant, think you might be pregnant, or you are pregnant the safest choice is to be alcohol free. If you drink alcohol, use a reliable form of birth control to prevent an alcohol exposed pregnancy.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnostic term that describes the effects on the brain and body of people exposed to alcohol in pregnancy. It is a lifelong disability and people with FASD experience challenges in their daily living and need support with many areas in their lives to reach their full potential. Each person with FASD is unique and has areas of strengths and challenges.

Early and appropriate supports for people living with FASD can have a positive impact and improve outcomes for those with the disability. In Waterloo Region, some exciting new services are available to those living with FASD.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS in Waterloo Region

REACH For It!- Adapted recreation for children and youth with FASD

Chalk It Up! is a celebration of the success of individuals and families living with FASD. Reach For It! is built upon community partnerships which are the key to supporting individuals with FASD.

Children and their families invited to Chalk It Up! will have time to meet other families, navigate an obstacle course, create their own chalk drawings and take home an activity package. The program will respect safe COVID-19 protocols that will include frequent hand sanitization, wearing of masks and physical distancing. Dedicated community partners have offered space and volunteers to join in the events, including KidsAbility, Carizon, KW Habilitation and Sunbeam Community and Developmental Services. The event is supported by the Waterloo Region FASD Action Group.

The media is welcome to come and check out the event and we ask that participants confidentiality is respected. There will be opportunity for an interview with a selected family.

The events will be held:

KidsAbility- 500 Hallmark Dr. Waterloo- August 28th at 10am

Carizon- 400 Queens St. South Kitchener- August 28th at 3pm

KW Habilitation- 99 Ottawa St. South- September 9th at 5:30pm

Lutherwood will launch the virtual Parent/Caregiver FASD Support Group

Parents and caregivers of children with FASD often experience some degree of social isolation caused by a lack of understanding of their child's disability from family, educators, health, and social service providers. The goal of the Parent/Caregiver FASD Support Group is to provide a forum for parents and caregivers to support and learn from one another, to share knowledge, and to build skills in order to improve outcomes for children with FASD and their families.

Registration is open August 16th through September 13th

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is expected to make an FASD Day announcement.

Please follow MCCSS on Twitter at @ONSocialService

What You Need to Know About FASD

Health and social service providers are increasingly concerned about the **alarming increase in women drinking at risky levels**. In a recent study, published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal women in Ontario aged 25-29 years (prime childbearing years) visiting emergency departments as a direct result of alcohol use **jumped 240 percent** from 2003 to 2016. With more than 50% of pregnancies unplanned women need to be aware, monitor and control their drinking habits before they are pregnant. As a community we need to understand how increased availability of alcohol, marketing and low cost alcohol increase the harms caused by alcohol.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic individuals have increased their alcohol consumption by 37% and alcohol has become increasingly more available with restaurants being allowed to sell take out alcohol, etc. <https://www.thinkfasd.ca/>

Did you know?

- FASD Is the leading cause of developmental disability in Canada
- Current studies suggest 4% of Canadians have FASD. Because you cannot see FASD and a lack of diagnostic services experts feel that the true rate is likely higher.
- FASD costs Canadians 5.3 – 9.7 billion dollars each year in care and services
- FASD is higher in vulnerable populations, including the child welfare and justice systems
- \$150,000 on FASD prevention saves \$1.6 million in treatment – huge return on investment

What Can You Do?

- Spread the truth - Ensure everyone around you knows the real risks of drinking in pregnancy
- Have fun without alcohol – Start a trend – Have a “Mocktail Party”
- If you are a woman who drinks, or you have sex with women who drink, ensure you use reliable birth control every time you have sex to prevent an alcohol exposed pregnancy
- Find out about Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines to decrease the risk of FASD, chronic disease and a potential addiction to alcohol
- Assess your own drinking habits at www.rethinkyourdrinking.ca

What Can Ontario Do to Decrease the Rate of FASD?

- Ensure all health providers discuss the dangers of alcohol use in pregnancy with all people of childbearing age. With 50% of pregnancies unplanned waiting until pregnancy is too late.

- Ensure alcohol pricing increases as inflation increases. This decreases alcohol consumption.
- Advocate against the sale of alcohol in convenience stores. Provinces that sell alcohol in convenience and grocery stores have more problems and costs associated with alcohol.
- Ensure businesses who sell alcohol post a sign (it is the law) about the risks of alcohol & pregnancy
- Encourage more alcohol-free events in communities and at universities and colleges
- Increase efforts in all educational institutions to warn all students about the dangers of drinking. Drinking increases the risk of future addictions, chronic diseases and alcohol use in pregnancy.

What Can You Do to Help Those Affected with FASD?

- Educate yourself about FASD and how it impacts your community in many areas such as: education; the criminal justice system; employment; and social services
- Talk to policy makers about the need to increase resources for prevention, diagnosis, intervention and appropriate education supports for children with FASD
- Talk to and offer support to a parent/caregiver supporting a child/adult with FASD. They are often isolated and judged.

This Press Package has been prepared by the Waterloo Region FASD Action Group in partnership with Sunbeam Community and Developmental Services.

Increasing FASD Awareness and Service in Waterloo Region and Ontario

Displays to Increase Awareness

A display encouraging alcohol free pregnancies with mocktail recipes is available for sign out at the Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services – 519-575-4400.

Community of Practice (COP) Training in Waterloo Region

Service Providers working in mental health, justice, education, child welfare, public health, housing and developmental services attended training to increase their knowledge and understanding of prevention, diagnosis and intervention of FASD. The COP goal is to improve how Waterloo Region addresses FASD.

Website - FASD in Waterloo Region

Developmental Services Resource Centre hosts a website on FASD www.fasdwaterlooregion.ca

FASD Classrooms to Meet Needs of Kids Affected with FASD in Waterloo Region

Classrooms designed to meet the needs of kids aged 8-12 and kids in grades 8-12 are offered in partnership with Carizon and Waterloo Region District School Board. Each classroom uses teaching methods to address the unique social/emotional and sensory needs of children living with FASD.

Local Professionals Stimulate Action on FASD at a Provincial Level with FASD ONE

Waterloo Region has five members on FASD ONE (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Ontario Network of Expertise). FASD ONE works to address issues related to FASD in the province.

<http://www.fasdontario.ca/cms/>

“Reach For It”

A recreational program for kids affected with FASD - supports youth and their families affected by FASD. Partners are: Waterloo Region Police Service, Conestoga College Recreation/Leisure and Lutherwood.

Waterloo Region Diagnostic Clinic

FASD Diagnostic Services for children up to 17 years of age living in the Waterloo Region. Provides full assessments, recommendations, and assistance with referral to appropriate community programs.

Referrals are made through agencies who are part of the diagnostic services clinic.

FASD Worker at Sunbeam Developmental Resource Centre

The FASD Coordinator will work with children, youth and families living with FASD up until the age of 18 or 21 and still attending school. You must reside in Waterloo Region. In addition, resources can be provided to caregivers and health and social service providers wanting more information about FASD. A referral can be made directly to our FASD Coordinator, Karen Huber at 519-741-1121 ext. 2246 or k.huber@dscwr.com

Alcohol During Pregnancy - Frequently Asked Questions

What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnostic term used to describe impacts on the brain and body of individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.

FASD is a lifelong disability. Individuals with FASD may experience challenges in their daily living, and need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, emotional regulation, and social skills.

Each individual with FASD is unique and has areas of both strengths and challenges.

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, her baby may have:

- permanent brain damage
- vision and hearing difficulties
- bones, limbs and fingers that are not properly formed
- heart, kidney, liver and other organ damage
- slow growth

A child and adult may have serious difficulties with:

- learning and remembering
- thinking things through and understanding consequences
- understanding the meaning of what others are saying
- getting along with others
- learning from past mistakes and solving problems

Is there a safe time to drink alcohol?

There is no safe time to drink alcohol in pregnancy. Your baby's brain develops throughout pregnancy. The safest choice in pregnancy is no alcohol at all. It is best to stop drinking before you get pregnant.

Is there a safe amount?

There is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It is best not to drink any alcohol if you think you might be pregnant, you are pregnant or if you are trying to get pregnant.

Are some types of alcohol less harmful than others?

Any type of alcohol can harm your baby (beer, coolers, wine or liquor). Binge drinking (more than 4 drinks/occasion) and daily drinking are known to be particularly harmful to an unborn baby. Enjoy delicious mocktails throughout your pregnancy – drinking without alcohol can be fun!

I had alcohol before I knew I was pregnant – what should I do?

It is not uncommon that pregnant women drink alcohol before knowing they are pregnant. In fact, over 50 per cent of births in Canada are unplanned. Even if you did drink, it is important to know that it is *never* too

late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Quitting drinking now and looking after your own health are the best ways to reduce the risk of harm to your baby. As well as not drinking alcohol, there are other steps you can take to be healthy including:

- Discuss your alcohol consumption with your health care provider
- Take a prenatal vitamin every day
- Follow a healthy diet
- See your doctor, nurse or midwife regularly
- Get plenty of rest
- Reduce your stress

If it is difficult for you to stop drinking call Here 247 - 1 844 437 3247 for a referral to an appropriate community agency.

Do children with FASD grow out of their problems?

There are many things teachers and parents can do to help children with FASD. However, FASD is a life-long disability. Teens or adults with FASD may have:

- depression
- trouble with the law
- drug or alcohol problems
- difficulty living on their own
- trouble keeping a job
- difficulty understanding how their behaviour affects others

What if the father drinks alcohol?

If the father drinks alcohol, it will not cause FASD. However, drinking alcohol can cause problems with fertility so potential fathers should also try to be as healthy as possible before and during pregnancy. It is easier for mothers to remain alcohol-free when she is supported by someone close to her.

What about breastfeeding and alcohol?

Alcohol freely distributes into breast milk. **Ideally, alcohol should be avoided when breastfeeding.** If a breastfeeding mother chooses to drink alcohol breast milk should be withheld temporarily after alcohol consumption; at least 2.5-3.0 hours per drink to limit unnecessary infant exposure.

How can others help?

Partners, family and friends can help pregnant women to stop drinking by being supportive and encouraging and asking the woman how they can help. Some women may not know the serious dangers of drinking in pregnancy; make them gently aware of the consequences.

Why is it important for our community to support alcohol-free pregnancies?

Based on a 2-4% prevalence rate and 2018 population predictions, approximately 12,024-24,048 people in Waterloo Region are likely affected by FASD, most of whom are undiagnosed. Many are experiencing significant struggles in the areas of learning, relationships and behaviour management and receiving inadequate or inappropriate supports. To reduce the impact and cost of FASD on our community we can all support potential parents to remain alcohol-free when planning a pregnancy and when pregnant.

Information and Services for Pregnant or Parenting Women Involved with Alcohol and/or Drugs in Waterloo Region

Region of Waterloo Public Health

Information about planning a pregnancy, pregnancy, child health and other health issues. Learn about the many services in our region that can help pregnant and parenting women.

519-575-4400 <http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/en/childfamilyhealth/alcoholinpregnancy.asp>

Drug and Alcohol Help Line

An Information and referral specialist will answer your call, email or web chat. Service is free and confidential

1-800-565-8603 <http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca/>

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Information on addictions and mental health 1-800-661-1111 www.camh.net

Grand River Regional Withdrawal Management Centre

Non-medical supervised residential withdrawal from drugs and alcohol - 519-749-4318

<http://www.grhosp.on.ca/Addictionsubstanceprograms>

HERE 24/7

HERE 24/7 is a centralized phone line, that you can call anytime, for addictions, mental health and crisis services in Waterloo, Wellington, Dufferin. Provides intake, assessment, referral, crisis services and appointment booking. 1-844-437-3247 <http://here247.ca/about-here-247/>

Moving Forward

Residential service for women, 18 and over, who are pregnant or parenting children up to 6 years of age, and have substance use concerns - 519-957-5001 www.houseoffriendship.org

Bridges to Health

Day treatment program for women, 18 and over, who have substance use concerns.

519-957-5001 www.houseoffriendship.org

Ray of Hope Youth Addiction Services

Community and day treatment programs are available for youth aged 13 – 17 years of age.

519-743-2311 <http://www.rayofhope.net/content/youth-addiction>

Your Health or Social Service Provider

Talk to your health care provider or social service worker as they too will be a good source of information regarding alcohol and substance use and they can refer you to appropriate services.