

- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS):** is a medical diagnosis used to describe an individual born with permanent brain damage, physical birth defects and growth deficiencies resulting from prenatal exposure to alcohol. There are other terms used to describe individuals with some, but not all of these characteristics.
- **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD):** is the umbrella term used to describe the range of defects and disabilities that are caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. These can include brain damage, vision and hearing difficulties, bones, limbs and fingers that are not properly formed, heart, kidney, liver and other organ damage and slow growth.
- FASD is under-recognized and under-reported. It is estimated that 1 in every 100 live births in Canada is affected by fetal alcohol exposure. That's 30,000 people living with FASD in the GTA alone and 300,000 across Canada.
- FASD is preventable and yet remains one of the most common causes of brain damage among Canadian children.
- There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. It is safest for women who are, or may become pregnant, to abstain from alcohol.

**Prenatal exposure to alcohol can cause:**

- developmental delays
- intellectual deficits and learning disabilities
- attention and/or memory problems
- difficulties with problem solving
- damage to the central nervous system
- neurological abnormalities
- hyperactivity
- difficulty managing anger
- prenatal and post-natal growth deficiencies
- distinctive facial features

**Potential consequences can include:**

- difficulty learning in school
  - problems securing and maintaining employment
  - trouble with the law
  - alcohol and drug abuse problems
  - homelessness
  - mental health problems
- Babies born with FASD do not outgrow these disabilities. They last a lifetime. However, the risk of unfortunate consequences such as homelessness and trouble with the law, can be decreased with early diagnosis and effective support systems.
  - In addition to the physical and emotional demands of raising a child with FASD, there are also economic consequences. There are the direct medical and educational costs, as well as the economic and social impact on the families, employers and the justice system. A recent study by Dr. Brenda Stade, R.N. of St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, estimates that the cost of FASD annually to Canada of those 1 to 21 years old, is \$344,208,000.
  - Prevention is effective. There are many things that we can do to help prevent FASD. Partners, families and friends of pregnant women, can support them and help them avoid drinking. Here are some tips to encourage an alcohol-free pregnancy:
    - Don't drink alcohol around pregnant women.
    - Have non-alcoholic drinks available at parties.
    - Get together in people's homes or at coffee shops rather than in bars.
    - Don't ever suggest that "just one little drink" will do no harm.

There is help available. For more information on drinking and pregnancy, talk to your health care provider, call Motherisk 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636) or visit [www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca](http://www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca).