

## Fast Facts on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that describes a wide range of effects that can occur in an individual who was exposed to alcohol during pregnancy (Chudley et al 2005).
- These effects may include physical, cognitive, social and emotional (behavioural) difficulties which last a life time.
- In Canada, it is estimated that 1% of the population has FASD.
- FASD is found in all economic and racial groups.

### Alcohol use in Pregnancy

- There is no known safe amount of alcohol or safe time during pregnancy to drink alcohol. It is best that women do not drink alcohol while pregnant or if there is a chance of becoming pregnant.
- Many factors influence how much the child will be impacted by alcohol use during pregnancy. These include the frequency, amount and timing of alcohol consumed, the mother's ability to break down alcohol, the mother's overall health and nutrition, other substances used, the age of the mother and the genetics of the fetus
- Prevention is not just a woman's issue. Pregnant women need support from their partners, extended family members and community.
- FASD is not genetic or inherited. A woman who has FASD will not give birth to a child with FASD if she does not drink alcohol during her pregnancy.

### FASD Diagnosis

- FASD is an umbrella term under which three medical diagnoses can be made. They are:
  - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
  - Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS)
  - Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Syndrome (ARND)
- These diagnoses should be made through a multidisciplinary assessment (i.e. doctor, psychology, speech language and occupational therapy)

- An early diagnosis can help family's access education, interventions and resources to support children to develop their fullest potential.
- The diagnostic centre for FASD in Manitoba is the Manitoba FASD Centre. The Centre is a multidisciplinary assessment, education, training and research centre. It provides assessment, diagnosis and short term follow up services where there has been confirmed prenatal exposure to alcohol.
- Referrals are accepted from health care providers, families and other agencies with the consent of the legal guardian. Referrals forms are available on the Manitoba FASD website ([www.fasdmanitoba.com](http://www.fasdmanitoba.com))
- When comprehensive diagnosis, education and appropriate interventions and supports are offered, the lives of FASD affected individuals, their families and communities can be significantly enhanced.

### **Living with FASD**

- People living with FASD often have no obvious physical differences, making their disability seem "invisible" to others. Sometimes this means that learning and behaviour problems are seen as wilful, defiant or strange behaviours. It is important to understand that these behaviours are actually caused by the differences in the structure of the brain and how the brain functions.
- There are a variety of primary and secondary issues associated with FASD. By understanding these disabilities proper supports can be put into place for the person living with FASD.
- Primary brain differences are those disabilities that the person is born with, which are caused by the exposure to alcohol during pregnancy. Some examples of primary disabilities include:
  - slower cognitive pace and ability to pay attention
  - difficulty with judgement, perception and planning
  - trouble with abstract thoughts
  - difficulty with learning and memory
  - problems with social skills
  - impulsive behaviour
  - poor understanding of boundaries
  - struggles to regulate emotions
  - acting younger than actual age
- Secondary behaviours are the difficulties that may arise later in life due to the poor fit between the individual's needs and the environment. Examples include:
  - mental health problems

- substance use
- addictions
- legal problems
- employment problems
- emotional problems
- housing issues and homelessness

- Although FASD involves real and permanent brain differences, this is just one truth about FASD. The other truth is that performance can exceed expectations in many areas. People with FASD can accomplish many things with the right supports.
- There are also many strengths demonstrated by individuals affected by FASD. These include:

- creative intelligence (music and art)
- perseverance (hard workers)
- strong sense of self
- friendly, trusting
- loyal, loving
- affectionate, compassionate and gentle
- sensitive
- nurturing
- lots of energy
- sense of wonder and great imagination
- rich fantasy life (poets, writers and wonderful story tellers)
- great sense of humour

**For more information online visit:**

Healthy Child Manitoba: [www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/index.html)

Manitoba Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy (MCAP): [www.capmanitoba.ca](http://www.capmanitoba.ca)

Manitoba Liquor Control Commission “With Child/Without Alcohol” Campaign:  
[www.withchildwithoutalcohol.com](http://www.withchildwithoutalcohol.com)

Manitoba FASD Centre: [www.fasdmanitoba.com](http://www.fasdmanitoba.com)