

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Definition: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that refers to a variety of problems that can result when a mother drinks alcohol while pregnant. FASD is the most common form of preventable brain damage to babies. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is one of many fetal alcohol spectrum disorders that can occur when women who are pregnant drink alcohol. Because a baby is affected by alcohol during its physical development in the womb, FASD is a permanent condition.

Q: How common is FASD?

A: Approximately 13% of Canadian women continue to drink while pregnant. However, 25% of Canadian pregnant women consume alcohol before they know they are pregnant, putting their baby at risk of FASD. About 9 out of every 1,000 babies in Canada are born with FASD.

Q: What does FASD look like?

A: Children and adults who have FASD can have a wide range of disabilities. They may have different facial features, such as small eye slit openings and a flattened area between the nose and lip. Other physical differences can include small body height and weight, drooping eyelids, organ deformities, and a small brain.

Q: Are there any other effects related to FASD?

A: Children, youth, and adults with FASD can have problems with attention span, learning, memory, and judgment. They may be hyperactive and irritable. They may have trouble learning skills that will allow them to live on their own, and may require a lifetime of supportive services.

Q: How are individuals with FASD diagnosed?

A: A diagnosis is usually made by an experienced professional team. Because FASD can result in future problems, such as contact with the criminal justice system, unemployment, lack of education, and additional psychiatric problems the earlier a diagnosis can be made, the better. In British Columbia, the Asante Centre in Maple Ridge conducts assessments upon referral (www.asantecentre.org/referral_process.html).

More than 3,000 babies a year are born with FASD in Canada

Health Canada
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/fasd-etcaf-eng.php#more>

Potential Economic and Social Costs of FASD

- ❖ **\$24,000/year in medical and other treatments**
- ❖ **Annual total cost of \$571 million for Canadians 21 years of age and under with FASD**
- ❖ **Lack of education**
- ❖ **Substance abuse**
- ❖ **Unemployment**
- ❖ **Inappropriate sexual behaviours**

Public Health Agency of Canada
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fasd-etcaf/pubs/fs-fi_02-eng.php

**International FAS
Awareness Day is
September 9th**

*Share in a minute of
reflection at 9:09
am this September*

<http://www.fasday.com/>

**Other terms
used to refer to
FASD include:**

❖ **Fetal Alcohol
Effects (FAE)**

❖ **Partial FAS
(pFAS)**

❖ **Alcohol-Related
Neuro-
developmental
Disorder (ARND)**

❖ **Alcohol-Related
Birth Defects
(ARBD)**

Public Health Agency of
Canada

[http://www.phac-
aspc.gc.ca/fasdetcaf/pubs/fs-fi_01-
eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fasdetcaf/pubs/fs-fi_01-eng.php)

Q: How can the effects of FASD be minimized?

A: Early interventions can help reduce the potential negative consequences of FASD. Although it is a lifelong condition, developmental programs introduced early in life can help children with FASD achieve important life-skills. Children with FASD who grow up in a home with stability and nurture, whether with a biological or foster parent, will have a better chance of developing these skills. During elementary and high school, students with FASD may receive special education services. However, the level of learning difficulties differ among youth with FASD, and many may be able to function well in a structured classroom environment or small class size without needing special services.

Q: What can I do to prevent this from happening?

A: Because it is unknown when alcohol causes the most damage to the developing baby, it is safest not to drink at all while pregnant. If you are thinking about getting pregnant, you should stop using alcohol. If you are, or may be, pregnant and you are drinking alcohol, stop as soon as you can. If you know someone who is pregnant, you can support them by abstaining from alcohol when you are with them, or helping them to avoid social situations that involve drinking alcohol. For more information and resources, contact the B.C. Centre for Social Responsibility (www.bccsr.ca) at (604) 870-5940.

Resources:

- FASD Information Service (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse): 1-800-559-4514.
- Motherisk helpline: 1-877-327-4636.
- Asante Centre for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. www.asantecentre.org.
- For more information on assessment and diagnosis, visit <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/fasd/assessment.htm>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/fasask.htm#how>.
- FAS Awareness Day. www.fasday.com.
- Provincial Outreach Program for FASD. www.fasdoutreach.ca
- FASworld, an international alliance of parents and professionals. www.fasworld.com
- Teaching students with FASD, Alberta Education: <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources/fasd.aspx>.
- FASD Tip Sheets for Parents from the FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan <http://www.skfasnetwork.ca/Network%20Resources%20&%20Materials.html>.