

## Alcohol facts and effects infosheet

# Alcohol-free pregnancy key messages

### At a glance

- Use the information in this sheet to review and inform consistent messaging about alcohol-free pregnancies on your websites, in printed resources and in other communications.
- Audiences are women who are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or who think they might be pregnant, women of child bearing age and their supporters.
- Alcohol-free pregnancies prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) as well as alcohol-related premature birth, miscarriage and stillbirth.
- Drinking any type of alcoholic drink during pregnancy can harm unborn babies.
- There is no known safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

### New Zealand's national advice message

*Stop drinking alcohol if you could be pregnant, are pregnant or are trying to get pregnant.*

*There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.*

Many organisations have endorsed this message, including the Ministry of Health, the Health Promotion Agency, the New Zealand College of Midwives, the New Zealand Nurses Organisation, The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, New Zealand Medical Association and New Zealand Family Planning, the Paediatric Society of New Zealand, and the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. A full list can be found at [alcoholpregnancy.org.nz](http://alcoholpregnancy.org.nz).

**Pregnant Women**



No alcohol

**0**

**STANDARD DRINKS**

There is no known safe level of alcohol use at any stage of pregnancy

## Alcohol can harm your baby

**If you drink alcohol, so does your baby.** Alcohol in your bloodstream passes easily through the placenta. Your baby is exposed to the same blood alcohol levels as you. Your baby can't break down the alcohol like you can.

Alcohol can affect the baby's growth, especially the brain. There's a risk that your baby may have a range of life-long problems, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Drinking alcohol when you're pregnant can also increase the chance of premature birth, or losing your baby through a miscarriage or stillbirth.

You can prevent FASD by being alcohol-free while you're pregnant. Not everyone who drinks alcohol while pregnant has a child with FASD but there is no way to know which babies will be affected. Being alcohol free altogether avoids any possible harm.

**All types of alcoholic drinks can harm your baby,** including beer, wine, cider, spirits or ready-to-drink (RTDs).

**There is no known safe amount,** even small amounts of alcohol can harm a baby's development.

**There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy.** Alcohol can harm a baby's development at any stage of the pregnancy. This can be even before a woman knows she is pregnant. If you're trying to get pregnant be alcohol-free too.

## What is fetal alcohol spectrum disorder?

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is the name given to the problems a baby may have if the mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Problems can include brain damage and physical birth defects. Problems may be seen after birth, or they may not be noticeable until the child is school-age. A child with FASD faces lifelong challenges.

## Chance of pregnancy?

Sometimes the pill, condoms or other contraception methods fail. If you think your contraception may have failed, don't drink alcohol. The best thing to do is to be alcohol-free until you know for sure that you're not pregnant.

## Did you drink before you found out you were pregnant?

It's never too late to stop drinking. By stopping drinking, you increase the chances of your baby being born healthy. For advice talk to your lead maternity carer, midwife or GP.

## Support for an alcohol-free pregnancy

Talk to your whānau, partner and friends about being alcohol-free during pregnancy. They can support your healthy pregnancy by:

- joining with you in being alcohol-free
- discouraging others from offering alcohol to you, or other women who may be pregnant
- making sure there are non-alcoholic drinks at social gatherings, workplaces, parties and events.

## Finding it hard to stop drinking? Get help.

You can get help by talking to your midwife, doctor, nurse or other health professional. They can discuss ways you can stay healthy during your pregnancy, answer your questions, or put you in touch with others who can help you.

The Alcohol Drug Helpline is also here for you. Contact them **on 0800 787 797, [alcoholdrughelp.org.nz](http://alcoholdrughelp.org.nz)** or free text **8681**, 24 hours, 7 days a week.

## Use effective contraception and avoid risky drinking

If you're not trying to get pregnant, use an effective method of contraception and avoid risky drinking. Risky drinking increases your chances for harm and unprotected sex. Risky drinking for women is more than four standard drinks<sup>1</sup> in one session. If you think your contraception may have failed, don't drink alcohol until you know for sure that you're not pregnant.

For more information, go to **[alcohol.org.nz](http://alcohol.org.nz)**.

1 One standard drink is approximately one small glass of wine or one regular bottle of beer or a shot of spirits.