



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION SERVICES

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FOETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME DAY

Friday, 9 September is Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Day this health day is utilised to carry through awareness messages to expectant women about the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Drinking alcohol when pregnant carries a significant risk to the unborn baby because alcohol easily crosses the placental barrier, thus passing from mother to child. Women who are pregnant or are attempting to get pregnant, or breast feeding should refrain from taking alcohol.

Depending on the level and the duration of alcohol consumed during pregnancy, the possible consequences of drinking alcohol while pregnant can vary from spontaneous abortion to premature labour, still births, and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (F.A.S.) is thought to be the third highest cause of congenital mental retardation. This syndrome is associated with:

- Cranio-facial malformation: typically a reduction in skull size, small upper lip and nose, receding and small lower jaw, contracted eyelids. These malformations persist with age.
- Growth retardation: wide ranging, affecting height, weight, skull size. Small height persists into adulthood.
- Abnormalities in the nervous system. Brain atrophy or incomplete development of some part of the brain may result in severe intellectual handicaps.
- Organ malformation. The most frequent malformations are of the heart, external genital organs and joints.



Even moderate consumption of alcohol, of about 2 or 3 drinks per day could present a risk to the development of the baby.

Foetal Alcohol Effects (F.A.E) and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome are preventable simply by women refraining from drinking alcohol during their pregnancy. FAS and FAE are permanent and irreversible. There is no cure and no treatment. FAS and FAE can impair a child's lifetime ability to function mentally, physically and socially and to be the best that they can be.

You can go to your local clinic or community health centre for further information or advice on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

ENDS

For more information please contact Lindiwe Khuzwayo on 083 939 9943 or Gloria Mhlaluka Mental Health & Substance Abuse Programme on (033) 395 2387.