



Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit (APSU)

Information for parents, carers and the community

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

BACKGROUND

Exposure of the unborn child to alcohol during pregnancy can cause a range of conditions called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The conditions included among the FASDs are fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), partial FAS (pFAS), and neurodevelopmental disorders-alcohol exposed (ND-AE).

Exposure to alcohol before birth can cause brain damage, growth failure, birth defects and problems with development, learning, behaviour and mental health. The effects are variable and depend on the timing and amount of alcohol exposure.

Below is a list of some of the features of FASD but there is considerable variability from child to child.

- Characteristic facial features
- Delays in reaching developmental milestones
- Memory problems
- Difficulty storing and retrieving information
- Impulsive and disorganised behaviour
- Poor concentration and disorganisation
- Inability to follow instructions and put them into action
- Difficulty grasping abstract concepts e.g. time, mathematics
- Learning difficulties
- Inability to predict or understand consequences of actions

FASD are life-long. However, early diagnosis and early support and therapy can improve outcomes for children and their families. Children with FASD and their families require assistance from a range of health, community and education services.

FASD are preventable and the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that: **For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding, the advice is clear: no alcohol is the safest option.**

USEFUL LINKS

To find out more about FASD please go to National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (NOFASD) Australia: <http://www.nofasd.org.au> NOFASD provides information, resources and educational opportunities to support families who have a child with FASD. They also have a library of research and personal stories from individuals and families affected by FASD.

Link to NHMRC guidelines: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ds10-alcohol.pdf

Link to the Telethon Kids Institute website with information about research -
<http://alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au/>

THE APSU SURVEILLANCE STUDY

The Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit is conducting a national study of FASD to:

1. To estimate the incidence of FAS, partial FAS, and ND-AE in children <15 years.
2. To describe current diagnostic practice for FASD.
3. To describe the presenting features of FASD.
4. To describe the use of and gaps in health services for children with FASD.
5. To educate paediatricians on the APSU mailing list about the Australian criteria for FASD diagnoses.

The study commenced in **December 2014**.