



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

What You Should Know About the Leading Preventable Cause of Developmental Disabilities

What is FASD

FASD describes the range of physical and developmental disabilities that can occur in a person who is prenatally exposed to alcohol.

Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause [birth defects](#) and [developmental disabilities](#), collectively known as [fetal alcohol spectrum disorders \(FASD\)](#). Alcohol use during pregnancy is also linked to other adverse outcomes, such as miscarriage, [stillbirth](#), [preterm \(early\) birth](#), and [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#).

Effect of Prenatal Alcohol and Other Drug Exposures is especially harmful to our children.

- The short and long-term effects of [prenatal alcohol exposure](#) (PAE) are more severe and longer lasting than prenatal exposure to other drugs. [PAE Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- The [use of alcohol during pregnancy](#) is greater than the use of other substances, and over [40% of pregnant women](#) using alcohol also report using one or more other substances harmful to their pregnancy.
- Read the

The Prevalence of FASD in the U.S. is a Significant Public Health Concern

In 2020, an [Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study](#) found 25.9% or 1-in-4 youths had been exposed to alcohol *in utero*.

- A NIH-supported [2018 FASD prevalence study](#) of 6,639 first-graders in four U.S. geographically-separated communities found 222 (3.3%) had FASD—only 2 had a previous diagnosis within the FASD spectrum demonstrated the lack of clinical awareness of the disabilities. The study estimated the prevalence of FASD ranged up to 1-in-20 children.
- [CDC researchers found](#) among pregnant women (ages 18-44), 1-in-7 had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, of whom about a third engaged in binge drinking (4+ drinks on at least one occasion over the past 30 days).
- [FASD Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to lifelong effects.

Up to **1 in 20** US school children may have FASDs.



People with FASDs can experience a mix of the following problems:

Physical issues

- low birth weight and growth
- problems with heart, kidneys, and other organs
- damage to parts of the brain



Which leads to...

Behavioral and intellectual disabilities

- learning disabilities and low IQ
- hyperactivity
- difficulty with attention
- poor ability to communicate in social situations
- poor reasoning and judgment skills



These can lead to...

Lifelong issues with

- school and social skills
- living independently
- mental health
- substance use
- keeping a job
- trouble with the law





Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

What You Should Know About the Leading Preventable Cause of Developmental Disabilities

Why is the Public Unfamiliar with FASD?

Misconceptions and Stigma Surrounding FASD and Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

- FASD is often overlooked due to the false belief that the disabilities are rare
- The role of alcohol in society triggers public resistance to abstinence messages
- People with FASD are often ridiculed and rejected due to perceptions that they are different
- Women are often shamed for drinking alcohol during pregnancy instead of helped
- Cultural norms and negative attitudes that dismiss children and adults with FASD from society and blame them for their exclusion
- Lack of knowledge among professionals and systems of care.

You Can Help Individuals Living with FASD Overcome Discrimination and Social Prejudice

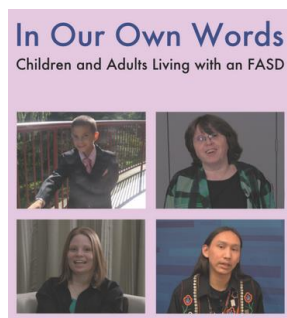
Respect People with FASD and Celebrate their Strengths

- Don't mock people with FASD as the target of insults, jokes, or ridicule
- Don't underestimate children and adults with FASD, or pity or patronize them
- Use positive, person first language that empowers rather than marginalizes people with FASD
- Portray a person with FASD as who they are and what is meaningful to them.

FASD United

Founded in 1990, FASD United (formerly National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome – NOFAS) is a public health nonprofit advocacy organization supporting individuals, families, and communities living with FASD and other preventable developmental disabilities and works to prevent prenatal exposure to alcohol, drugs, and other substances known to harm fetal development by raising awareness and supporting women and their partners before and during their pregnancy.

We believe that to open the minds of those who can make a difference, we must remove the addiction and maternal health stigma. Addiction to alcohol and drugs is a chronic, progressive disease that can be successfully treated. Treatment works, saves money, and prevents FASD. Shaming and punishing birth mothers and ridiculing persons living with FASD perpetuates the crisis and misunderstanding of the issue.



Help FASD United share the FASD lived experience, empower Warrior Moms, Stamp Out Stigma, and pass the FASD Respect Act, [S.2238](#) and [H.R.4151](#).