

FASD trends higher around Holidays

Lots of people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder conceived during Christmas and New Years'

By Mikaela Kueflex

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The Alberta FASD Network is trying to create awareness during the holiday season, to help prevent people from drinking while pregnant.

"We have lots of people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) who were conceived during Christmas and New Years." Said Adult West Zone Key Worker for Northwest Central FASD Network Sherri See.

St. Patricks Day and August also have trends with high FASD birth conceptions.

FASD is a "preventable, lifelong disability resulting from prenatal exposure to alcohol that has no cure." According to the Alberta FASD Network

"There is no safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy," said See

The risk of drinking while pregnant can affect the baby from conception until birth. The severity of the affects depends on the days and the amount the mother drinks during pregnancy. It also depends on whether she's had children before.

"Facial features are affected if mom drinks on days 19, 20, and 21 of the pregnancy. For each day of pregnancy, there is something developing. If that's the day that mom drinks, that's the area that will be affected," said See.

The disorder causes disabilities such as physical birth defects, developmental delays, learning disabilities, memory problems, communication problems, and understanding consequences. It also affects cognitive skills and organs such as the lungs, heart and liver. People with FASD have a smaller birth weight and smaller heads. They also suffer from socially under-development.

"People appear to be functioning and doing quite well but they actually might be functioning at an eight year old level because of the brain damage. They also might do well in the first few years of their life. When they hit that point when they aren't developing anymore, intellectually, they're left behind and outcast. Some end up falling through the cracks," said See.

"A lot of adults I see now don't understand why they can't hold a job, why people they're own age aren't friends with them, and why they don't fit into the general public," said See.

According to the network, nine percent of Alberta women reported drinking during their last pregnancy, with 41% of those women coming from the highest income group. Research estimates that

nine in every 1000 babies are born with FASD every year. This amounts to 46,000 Albertans with FASD, with an estimated 500 babies born with the disorder every year.

Records state that 40% of pregnancies are unplanned. "A lot of people don't know they are pregnant until they're six to eight weeks along. People are unaware that babies can be affected before mom's know they are pregnant," said See.

Problems arise when those affected try to get a diagnosis with FASD but the mother doesn't admit to drinking alcohol while pregnant. "They can't get an assessment. Parents with children who are adopted also have a difficult time providing that information, unless it's in their birth records," said See