

# Alcohol and Pregnancy

## Why take the risk?

Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs), which are physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities that last a lifetime. More than 3 million US women are at risk of exposing their developing baby to alcohol because they are drinking, having sex, and not using birth control to prevent pregnancy. About half of all US pregnancies are unplanned and, even if planned, most women do not know they are pregnant until they are 4-6 weeks into the pregnancy. This means a woman might be drinking and exposing her developing baby to alcohol without knowing it. Alcohol screening and counseling helps people who are drinking too much to drink less. It is recommended that women who are pregnant or might be pregnant not drink alcohol at all. FASDs do not occur if a developing baby is not exposed to alcohol before birth.

### Women can:

- Talk with their health care provider about their plans for pregnancy, their alcohol use, and ways to prevent pregnancy if they are not planning to get pregnant.
- Stop drinking alcohol if they are trying to get pregnant or could get pregnant.
- Ask their partner, family, and friends to support their choice not to drink during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant.
- Ask their health care provider or another trusted person about resources for help if they cannot stop drinking on their own.

### Want to learn more?

[www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/fasd](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/fasd)



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
 National Center on Birth Defects  
 and Developmental Disabilities

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## 3.3 Million

More than 3 million  
 US women are at  
 risk of exposing  
 their developing  
 baby to alcohol.

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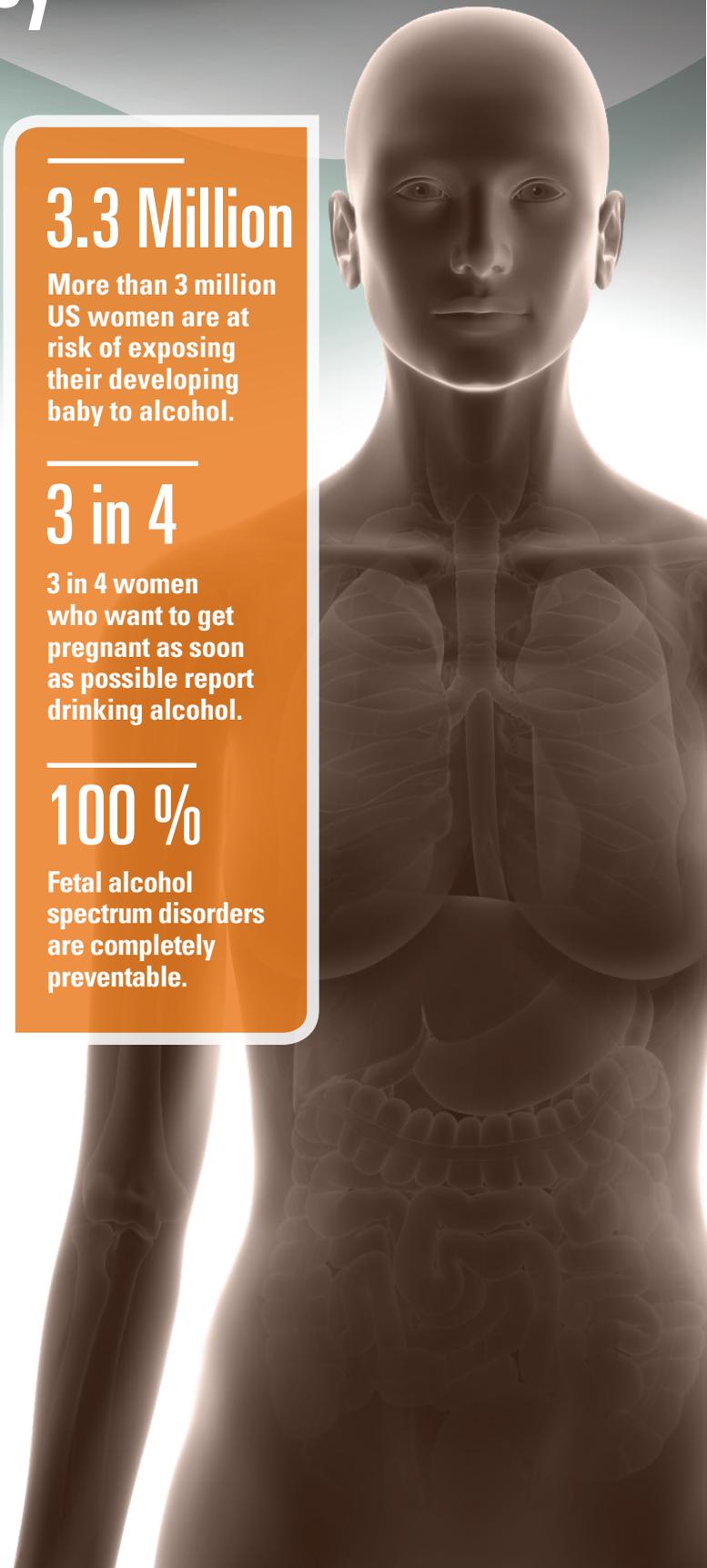
## 3 in 4

3 in 4 women  
 who want to get  
 pregnant as soon  
 as possible report  
 drinking alcohol.

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## 100 %

Fetal alcohol  
 spectrum disorders  
 are completely  
 preventable.



# Problem:



## Alcohol can harm a developing baby before a woman knows she is pregnant.

### Why take the risk?

- Women who are pregnant or who might be pregnant should be aware that any level of alcohol use could harm their baby.
- All types of alcohol can be harmful, including all wine and beer.
- The baby's brain, body, and organs are developing throughout pregnancy and can be affected by alcohol at any time.
- Drinking while pregnant can also increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

### Doctors, nurses, or other health professionals can help prevent alcohol use during pregnancy in 5 ways:

1. Provide alcohol screening and brief counseling to all women.
2. Recommend birth control to women who are having sex (if appropriate), not planning to get pregnant, and drinking alcohol.
3. Advise women who are trying to get pregnant to stop drinking alcohol.
4. Refer for additional services for women who cannot stop drinking on their own.
5. Follow up yearly or more often, as needed.

## 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

Drinking while pregnant costs the US **\$5.5 billion** (2010).

