

Strengthening the message about pregnancy and alcohol

STOPPING HARM CAUSED BY ALCOHOL

Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education



SUSAN HICKSON

Health Promotion Officer

21 November 2018

2nd Australasian FASD Conference

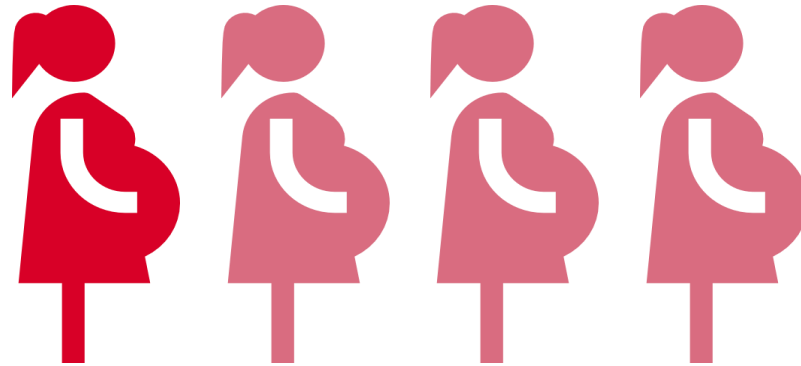
Review of a health information leaflet has implications for FASD prevention

- Women Want to Know (WWtK) provides support to health professionals to give the right advice to women about pregnancy and alcohol
- WWtK women's leaflet a key component of the project
- Research to review the women's leaflet
- Key findings from focus group discussion
- Implications of the way the alcohol guideline is communicated
- WWtK is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health



Women continue to drink during pregnancy partly because they receive mixed messages

- 1 in 4 women drink alcohol when they know they are pregnant



- Women receive mixed messages about risks of drinking during pregnancy

“Out of curiosity, have you ever had a glass of wine while pregnant? I dream about it, I crave it, I have researched the risks (said it’s safe to have 1-2 glasses of wine a week, just not enough to get drunk). I know I should just wait, but wanted to see what other people have done in this situation”

Facebook thread illustrates that women are confused about or unaware of the risks



Lovely, if you want to have a little glass of wine then that's understandable. I had a glass at special occasions with all three of mine and they're all fine



Fetal dependent alcohol syndrome is for alcoholics. They have like 8 plus units a day.



Fetal alcohol syndrome can occur for any infant, not just those born to alcoholics. ..I have seen that it can occur in any family and the effects can be devastating. It is recommended not to drink alcohol in the first trimester. I would limit alcohol intake after that.



One glass won't do any harm to your bub. Even the medical people say there is no evidence that moderate alcohol with dinner will harm either of you.



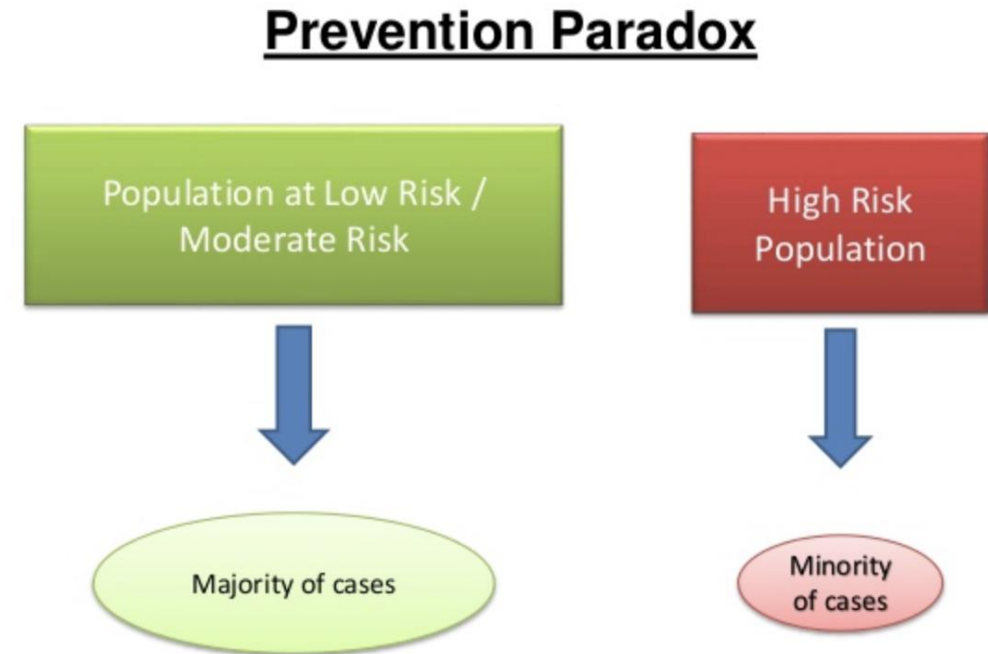
Low risk pregnancy, otherwise healthy mum, a single glass is not going to do harm.

Prevention paradox calls for a precautionary approach to drinking during pregnancy

- The large number of people at low risk give rise to more cases of a disease than the small number who are at high risk.

In the FASD context:

- The large number of women who drink during pregnancy at lower risk levels will result in more cases of FASD than the small number of women who drink heavily



For women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy, not drinking is the safest option

Guideline 4:

Maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby

A For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking is the safest option

B For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option



WWtK leaflet useful: recommendation to review for suitability as stand-alone resource.

- The women's leaflet has been a key component of the project but required testing with women as a stand-alone resource.
- Strengths include its
 - tone
 - conversational style
 - non-judgmental language
 - content
- Phase 1 of the research involved
 - literature review
 - resource audit
 - context scan



WWtK leaflet rates well against comparable resources

Compared to other resources
WWtk leaflet was:

- Fresh and modern in design
- Non-judgmental
- Clearly and unambiguously for pregnant women
- Found to benefit from a clear Australian Government logo

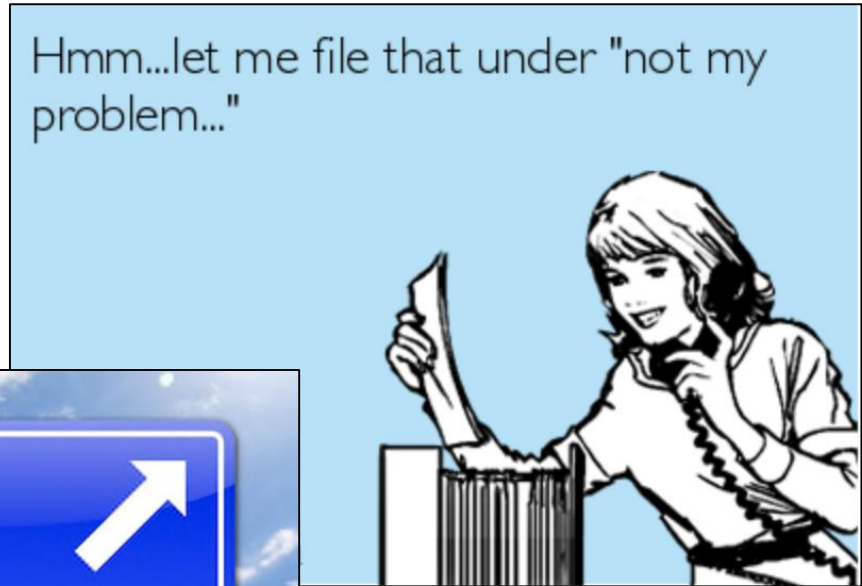


(Resource numbers 1, 26, 34, 38, 41 from the literature review)



Guideline 4 is seen as friendly advice – not a firm recommendation

- Allows women to self-exclude
- Based on inconclusive research
- Justifies continuation of drinking
- A lack of definitive instruction
- Valid for heavy drinkers only



Options were presented for a revised leaflet to provide definitive, unambiguous advice

- Refine the leaflet to:
 - minimise ambiguity
 - challenge misperceptions
 - reduce the potential for self-exclusion
 - maintain existing tone and content
 - improve the layout and design



'No amount of alcohol is safe' has more impact than 'safer option'

Option 1: When you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

Option 2: If you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, experts advise that no amount of alcohol is safe.

Option 3: It is safest for women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy to avoid all alcohol.



Women are more accepting of a stronger message about alcohol consumption when the consequences of drinking are better understood

- Women were unaware of some consequences of drinking in pregnancy, for example:
 - Poor memory
 - Learning difficulty
 - Behaviour problems
- Consensus that the risk calls for a strong and clear message

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – Facts

For most children with FASD there are no visible signs but they can have brain damage causing:

- Physical and emotional developmental delay
- Impaired speech and language development
- Learning problems, e.g. poor memory
- Difficulty controlling behaviour.

The effects of FASD are lifelong.

Recommendations incorporated into updated leaflet – ‘information you might not know about pregnancy and alcohol’

Dispelling myths about pregnancy and alcohol

- There is no safe amount to drink during pregnancy. Having one or two drinks on a special occasion has not been found to be safe for developing babies.
- There is no safe time to drink during pregnancy. The baby's brain continues to develop throughout pregnancy. Drinking alcohol at any time will affect the developing brain.
- There is no safe type of alcohol to drink. Wine, beer and spirits all pass through the placenta to your baby.
- The concentration of alcohol in your blood is the same as the concentration in your breastmilk.
- Alcohol is not a healthy way to relieve stress.
- "Everything in moderation" does not apply to alcohol in pregnancy. Any alcohol you drink will pass through the placenta to your baby.

**No safe amount.
No safe time.
No safe type.**



Further information and support

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline
1800 822 438
www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au

National FASD Hub
www.fasdhub.org.au

NOFASD Australia
www.nofasd.org.au

National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline
1800 250 015
www.drughelp.gov.au

National Health and Medical Research Council
Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol
www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol-guidelines

Australian Breastfeeding Association
1800 686 268
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Feedsafe: App to assist breastfeeding mothers
www.feedsafe.net

Lifeline
13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

This leaflet has been developed as part of the Women Want to Know project by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) in collaboration with leading health professional bodies across Australia. The Women Want to Know project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.
Published 2018

**Australian Government
Department of Health**

Information you might not know about
pregnancy & alcohol

fare Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education

women want to know About pregnancy & alcohol



Pregnancy is an exciting time, a time when many women want to know what they can do to ensure that they stay healthy and give their baby the best start in life.

One thing that is important in keeping you and your baby healthy is to avoid drinking alcohol while pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding. This leaflet will help you make an informed choice and give you the best advice for you and your baby.

If you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, experts advise no amount of alcohol is safe.

The National Health and Medical Research Council, Australia's peak body on developing national health advice, recommends that for women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

This is because no amount of alcohol has been proven as safe. The evidence is clear: alcohol causes birth defects. All alcohol crosses the placenta harming the baby.

If you have consumed alcohol while pregnant and are concerned, or are having trouble stopping drinking, you should talk to your doctor, midwife or obstetrician.

Talking about alcohol

Many women don't know exactly when they become pregnant and many pregnancies are not planned – so it is possible that you might have been drinking alcohol before you were aware of your pregnancy.

Talking about your drinking may seem daunting, but health professionals speak to lots of people about these issues and they want the best for you and your baby.

It is also important to talk to someone if you think you might be struggling with depression, stress or anxiety. Your health professional can refer you to services in your area to support you and your baby to be healthy. Some support services are listed on the back page.

Risks from drinking alcohol during pregnancy

- Increased risk of stillbirth, premature birth and low birth weight
- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Increased risk of birth defects
- Damage to the baby's brain causing conditions known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – Facts

For most children with FASD there are no visible signs but they can have brain damage causing:

- Physical and emotional developmental delay
- Impaired speech and language development
- Learning problems, e.g. poor memory
- Difficulty controlling behaviour

The effects of FASD are lifelong.

When planning a pregnancy

Alcohol can reduce fertility and greatly increase the time it takes to get pregnant.

If you have stopped using contraception and are trying to get pregnant, you should consider not drinking alcohol at all.

When pregnant

It is never too late to stop drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

People might ask why you are not drinking. If you're not ready to announce your pregnancy, try saying:

- I'm on a health kick and have given up alcohol.
- No thanks, I'm not drinking tonight
- I have a big day tomorrow so no thanks

If you're happy to tell people, simply say: No thanks, not while I'm pregnant.

Make the pledge to go alcohol free during your pregnancy or the pregnancy of a loved one.
www.pregnantpause.com.au

If it is difficult for you to stop drinking you should speak to your health professional for support.

When breastfeeding

Not drinking alcohol is the safest option. Alcohol enters the breast milk and may stay there for several hours.

Alcohol can decrease the flow of milk and cause your baby to be unsettled.

Alcohol in breastmilk can affect the baby's brain and spinal cord development.

Updated leaflet has been distributed nationally.

- 3,350 GP surgeries Australia wide (maintained supply until Jan 2018)
- more than 200 hospitals – every public maternity service
- 4,980 RANZCOG members
- Hunter-New England LHD practice change project
- poster
- advertising & promotion



NO AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL IS SAFE

Two new resources are available for women
See www.alcohol.gov.au for ordering details



women want to know
The Women Want to Know project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health



Whose role is it to provide the clear advice that women want about alcohol and pregnancy?

- The current national guideline does not appear to communicate the appropriate message
- NHMRC state their role is to consider the scientific evidence about risk, not interpretation
- Whose role is it to ensure the guidelines are understood?
- The WWtK women's leaflet provides a clear message that no amount of alcohol consumption during pregnancy is safe.
- Order it from www.alcohol.gov.au



Susan Hickson

www

www.fare.org.au



info@fare.org.au



[@FAREAustralia](https://twitter.com/FAREAustralia)



[Vimeo.com/FARE](https://vimeo.com/FARE)

**STOPPING
HARM**
CAUSED BY
ALCOHOL

Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education