

# It is safest not to drink during pregnancy. What does this mean?

## Information for Service Providers

According to Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: "The safest option during pregnancy or when planning to become pregnant, or about to breastfeed, is to not drink alcohol at all." These guidelines were developed by a team of independent Canadian and international experts, on behalf of the National Alcohol Strategy Advisory Committee, and are based on the most recent and best available scientific research and evidence.

### NO SAFE TIME

**"Zero for Nine"  
is best.**

There is no threshold of alcohol use in pregnancy that has been definitively proven to be safe. Exposure to alcohol at any time in a pregnancy can affect the fetus's brain. Even from the very start of pregnancy, alcohol can have serious and permanent consequences.

#### What to Tell Women:

There is no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Your baby's brain is developing throughout pregnancy. In fact, it is best to stop drinking before you get pregnant.

### NO SAFE KIND



Any type of alcohol can harm the fetus (beer, coolers, wine or spirits). Some of these drinks have higher alcohol content per volume than others. What matters is the amount and frequency of alcohol consumed, not the type of drink. Binge drinking and heavy drinking are very harmful to a fetus.

#### What to Tell Women:

All types of alcohol can harm your baby (beer, coolers, wine, or spirits). Binge drinking and heavy drinking are very harmful to a baby.

### NO SAFE AMOUNT

**Binge drinking =  
More than 3 drinks**

While some studies have shown minimal risk of harm at lower levels of consumption (e.g., 1-2 drinks a week), the potential for misunderstanding standard drink sizes and the impossibility of calculating in other individual risks (e.g., genetics, the effects of nutrition and stress and other substance use) means that the safest course of action is to avoid alcohol completely.

#### What to Tell Women:

It is best not to drink any alcohol during your pregnancy. Scientists don't know if there is a safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy.

### What about breastfeeding?

Alcohol passes into a woman's bloodstream and into her breast milk at similar levels. While babies are exposed to a very small amount of the alcohol a mother drinks, they do have a rapidly developing central nervous system and an underdeveloped ability to metabolize alcohol. Ideally it is best to avoid breastfeeding for about 2 hours after drinking one alcoholic beverage. There are ways to safely breastfeed and drink more than one drink in a sitting. Occasional alcohol use should not be a reason for women to stop breastfeeding.

#### What to Tell Women:

When breastfeeding, occasionally having one drink or less per day has not been shown to be harmful to the baby. There are ways to safely breastfeed if you plan to drink more than this. Speak to your health care provider for more information.

Adapted with permission from the BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health. For more information on their work visit: Coalescing on Women and Substance Use • [www.coalescing-vc.org](http://www.coalescing-vc.org)

To read a short information package on this topic which includes information on what you can do to help as a service provider, where to make a referral in Manitoba, and much more, visit [manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd/resources.html](http://manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd/resources.html)



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