Alcohol and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs)

Why am I being warned about alcohol and FASDs?

- Ethyl alcohol in alcoholic beverages is on the Proposition 65 list because it can cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.
- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities in the child, as well as miscarriage and stillbirth.

What are fetal alcohol spectrum disorders?

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, or FASDs, are life-long physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. They are a leading type of developmental disability. FASDs can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. The effects of this can include life-long:

- Intellectual disabilities and problems with behavior and learning. Children with FASDs might do poorly in school and have difficulties with math, memory, attention, judgment, communication, getting along with others and poor impulse control.
- Heart, kidney, or bone defects, or problems with vision or hearing.
- Abnormal facial features, and growth and central nervous system problems.

Often, a person with a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder has a mix of these problems.

How can fetal alcohol spectrum disorders be prevented?

Alcohol in the mother’s blood passes to the baby through the umbilical cord. Women who are pregnant or might be pregnant should not drink alcohol at all. All types of alcoholic beverages are harmful, including wines and beer.

If a woman is drinking alcohol during pregnancy, it is never too late to stop drinking. Because brain growth takes place throughout pregnancy, the sooner a woman stops drinking the safer it will be for her and her baby.

Is any level of alcohol safe while pregnant? What should I do if I am pregnant or might be pregnant?

There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant. The CDC advises that women:

- 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.

About half of all US pregnancies are unplanned and, even if planned, most women do not know they are pregnant until they are four to six weeks into the pregnancy. This means a woman might be drinking and exposing her developing baby to alcohol without knowing it.

For more information:
• US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
  ▸ Alcohol and Pregnancy:  
    http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/fasd/
  ▸ Facts about FASDs:  
    http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/facts.html

• National Institutes of Health – National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIH - NIAAA)
  ▸ Fetal Alcohol Exposure  

• US Surgeon General
  ▸ Advisory on Alcohol Use in Pregnancy  

• American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
  ▸ Alcohol and Pregnancy: Know the Facts  

• American Academy of Pediatrics
  ▸ Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Program Frequently Asked Questions  

Proposition 65:
• California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)
  Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)
  ▸ Proposition 65: Background:  
    https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/faq
  ▸ Proposition 65: The Chemical List:  
    https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/chemicals