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#### Recommended Citation

Pemberton, B. (2007). Alcohol and Drug Use during Pregnancy. Deaf Rochester News, 5(3), 16.

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# Alcohol and Drug Use during Pregnancy

Submitted by Bruce Pemberton



We are an alcohol-drinking, tobacco-smoking, and drug-use society. Alcohol and drug use during pregnancy continues to be a national problem that results in many babies being born with birth defects. Research shows that between 11% and 18% of all pregnant women in the United States are using drugs such as alcohol, marijuana, “crack” cocaine, amphetamines, sedatives and PCP.

Alcohol’s effect on the developing baby is one of the most widely researched topics on pregnancy. Fetal alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the birth defect that is caused by a woman’s use of alcohol during pregnancy. The baby is exposed to the same chemicals that the mother uses. The developing baby and its circulation are protected by the placenta. Alcohol and other chemicals can cross the placenta (protective barrier), so it can prevent the developing baby from getting enough oxygen and the nutrients that it needs to help the brain and organs to form properly. Most children born with FAS have a much greater risk of irreversible physical abnormalities as well as developmental disorders.

Some of the signs and symptoms of FAS are:

- Slow development and learning disabilities

- Poorly formed bones
- Facial abnormalities
- Poorly formed organs
- Mental handicaps or mental retardation
- Small head
- Folds of skin that cover inside the corners of the eyes
- Short nose with low bridge
- No vertical groove between nose and mouth

For those who are pregnant or planning pregnancy, it is clear that abstaining from all alcohol and drugs is crucial. Avoiding alcohol and drug exposure during pregnancy will give the precious growing fetus the best opportunity to be born healthy.

Alcohol and drug abuse have both medical and social consequences. These involve damage to vital organs and problems with interpersonal relationships. In addition, research shows the children of alcoholic parents are at greater risk than other children for becoming addicted to alcohol as well as drugs.

The evidence of the effects of alcohol and drugs on the unborn fetus is overwhelming and not to be overlooked.