

FASD

FASD AWARENESS DAY
September 9

Let's Talk
About It

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day?

FASD Awareness Day is held every year on September 9. This day is set aside to increase knowledge and understanding about FASD. People and organizations across Canada and around the world organize events in their own communities. We invite agencies, communities, health regions, individuals, and organizations in Saskatchewan to join us in raising awareness about preventing FASD.

WHY SEPTEMBER 9TH?

There is symbolism to using the 9th day of the 9th month. It stands for the 9 months of pregnancy.

In early 1999, a small group of parents raising children with an FASD began to talk about how they might make a difference. They were frustrated by the lack of awareness of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) by both the public and professionals. They felt an increased understanding about FASD, could in turn, prevent a baby from being exposed prenatally to alcohol.

Thanks to the work of this group, FASD Awareness Day is celebrated every September. Activities can happen throughout the 9th month, not just on September 9.

In 2000, the Saskatchewan Minister of Health proclaimed September 9 as FAS Awareness Day in Saskatchewan. FAS Awareness Day became legislation in July 2002. Each year, Saskatchewan cities and towns host events to raise awareness of FASD.

What is FASD?

FASD is a brain-based disorder resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure. Individuals with FASD can experience a range of mental, physical, learning, and behaviour problems throughout life. It is considered more common than any other disability in the western world, yet remains relatively invisible.

Diagnosis and Prevalence

As of 2015, new Canadian guidelines provide recommendations for diagnosing FASD. The new guidelines include key recommendations around several areas:

- Counselling women and their partners about alcohol during pregnancy or when planning a pregnancy
- Screening of all pregnant women and new mothers for alcohol use by trained professionals using tested tools
- Referring individuals for possible diagnosis if there is evidence of prenatal exposure to alcohol at levels associated with adverse brain function
- Conducting complete social and medical histories of patients suspected of having FASD

Diagnosis is complicated for a variety of reasons:

- Over the years there have been many definitions of FAS/FASD
- The range of social, behavioural, and medical signs are not easily recognizable in newborns, infants, and young children, so a diagnosis may not be made until the child is in school or not made at all
- There may be other barriers such as time, income, or language that keeps people from accessing services

Determining the prevalence (total number of people affected by FASD at a specific point in time) is difficult to do because there are no national statistics on FASD in Canada. It is commonly quoted that 1% of the population has an FASD; however, this is considered a conservative estimate. Other research has found that as high as 2-5% of the population may have an FASD.

What are some other considerations when raising awareness?

Preventing FASD is more complicated than just telling people about the effects alcohol has on developing babies. A woman might drink alcohol for a variety of reasons:

- She doesn't know she is pregnant.
- She doesn't know that alcohol can cause damage to her developing baby.
- She has heard conflicting information from healthcare professionals, friends, family, and the media about pregnancy and alcohol and is not sure what to believe.
- Drinking is part of her social life and her partner, family, friends, and co-workers influence her drinking.
- She might drink to soften psychological pain (e.g., past trauma, mental health, difficult life situations).
- She might be dependent on alcohol.

Some women may need help to stop drinking. Some may need information on how alcohol affects babies. They can talk with their healthcare provider, someone they trust, or find organizations that provide support. If a woman cannot stop drinking, cutting back on her drinking as much as possible will reduce the harm to her baby. Women can make the choice to refuse alcohol in social situations, by saying "No thanks, I'm pregnant", choosing an alcohol-free beverage, or changing the subject.

Why is it important to raise awareness of FASD prevention?

Alcohol is a popular drink in Canada with special social and cultural significance, yet it also causes many types of harm.³ It is important to know that alcohol-free pregnancies protect babies from being born with FASD. Alcohol crosses the placenta to the mother's fetus and the developing baby cannot break down alcohol as quickly as an adult, so it gives the alcohol more time to damage the developing cells of the baby. The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute supports education and awareness about pregnancy and alcohol and believes everyone has a role in preventing FASD.



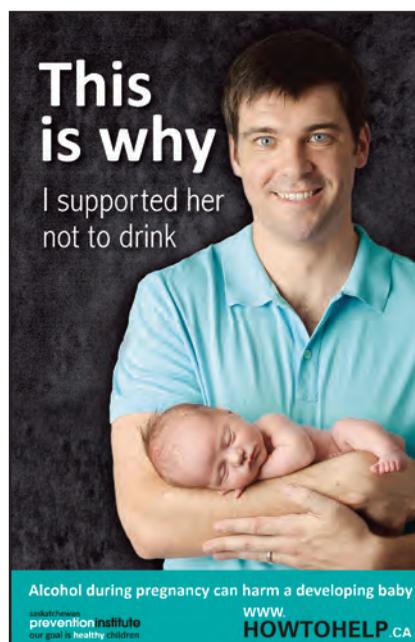
How does the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute raise awareness?

The photo to the left is from our FASD Prevention media campaign targeted to professional women of childbearing age.

Our second campaign, seen in the lower photo, raises awareness that it is not just a woman's responsibility to prevent FASD. A partner, family, co-workers, and friends can support a woman who is pregnant to make a decision to not drink alcohol during her pregnancy. Through learning more about FASD and alcohol-dependency services nearby, we can all support women to stop or reduce drinking. A partner can offer drinks without alcohol and ask her what will help to stop drinking. Taking part in activities without alcohol and talking with her about pregnancy and alcohol can also help. For more ideas visit www.howtohelp.ca.

For posters, please contact the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute at 306.651.4300 or info@skprevention.ca.

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute has other resources to help raise awareness and further understanding. Staff members may be available to make community presentations.



¹ Sampson et al. (1997)

² May et al. (2014)

³ <http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/topics/alcohol/Pages/default.aspx>

HELP RAISE

AWARENESS



What Can Your Community Do

TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT FASD?

- Identify your leaders and build on community strengths/assets
- Get as many people involved as possible
- Host a gathering to talk about what activities you can do
- Contact the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute FASD Prevention Program team at info@skprevention.ca

What are some ideas communities have used to raise awareness?

- Obtain local proclamation of FASD Awareness Day from municipal or First Nation Council (*see sample letter at the end of this document*).
- Serve Mocktails in local SLGA outlets or grocery stores.
- Plan a minute of reflection in schools, followed by a video presentation. A video lending library from www.skprevention.ca is available.
- Ring bells for 1 minute, beginning at 9:09 a.m.
- Set up a health fair display in a mall, library, or other location.
- Send out a media release and invitation to media to attend local activities.
- Host a presentation about FASD prevention.
- Encourage staff members to wear FASD Let's Talk About It t-shirts and host a competition in the workplace to see which group of colleagues gets the most questions about the t-shirt.
- Offer free non-alcoholic drinks to pregnant women at bars and restaurants.
- Share Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines <http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en.pdf>.
- Plan a Pregnant Pause – wear t-shirts with balloons and suddenly 'pause' or 'freeze' for 1 minute in public spaces.
- Celebrate with a Pow Wow, round dance, sweat lodge, traditional pipe ceremony, community 'breakFASD' breakfast, potluck, feast, light lunch n' learn, or community barbeque.
- Ask local restaurants, lounges, or cafeterias to put out tent cards <http://www.skprevention.ca/shop/no-thanks-im-pregnant-tent-card-download-or-order-copy/> with information about FASD.
- Organize talking and sharing circles, special prayers, drumming, poster blitzes, contests, rallies, walks, speeches, or candlelight vigils.
- Put up banners in the community.
- Make FAS knots (instructions found at <http://www.come-over.to/FASDAY/manual.htm#10>).
- Participate in social media using the hashtag #FASDDay.

PLANNING AN EVENT OR MESSAGING?

Here are some things to consider

To ensure we do not harm individuals, families, or communities when talking about pregnancy and alcohol, use messages that are:

- Hopeful (e.g., Every day without alcohol is good for the developing baby.)
- Respectful (e.g., Most women stop drinking as soon as they find out they are pregnant.)
- Compassionate, so women feel free to talk about the pressures to drink during pregnancy
- Sensitive (e.g., What have you heard about pregnancy and alcohol?)

By staying open to information, being aware and reflective of our own attitudes and values, and not sensationalizing FASD, we show understanding. Avoiding negative comments and reactions honours the capabilities of a woman to make choices about her own health and the health of her children.

Working together as a partner with a woman to address her needs and issues, and building partnerships within communities in addressing all aspects of FASD prevention is important. Support, not judgement, makes a difference. It is not just a woman's responsibility to prevent FASD – it takes a community.

Using person-first language, when talking about individuals with an FASD, puts the person first and focuses on their abilities; not the disability.

These guiding principles direct the awareness and prevention work of the FASD Prevention team at the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute. A non-judgemental approach ensures a woman can safely talk about and explore her use of alcohol and other substances.

Some other questions to guide your planning...

- What is our objective for the day? What are we trying to accomplish?
- How will we achieve our objectives?
- What is our budget?
- Who is the target audience? (general public, educators, healthcare providers, women, men, youth)
- Who can we partner with?
- What is the timeline for our tasks and activities?
- Where are we holding our event and what is our alternative location?
- Whom can we contact in the media to promote our event?
- How will we know it is a success?

Where Can You Find More Information?

Saskatchewan

- **Saskatchewan Prevention Institute**
www.skprevention.ca
- **Government of Saskatchewan**
www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/accessing-health-care-services/health-services-for-people-with-disabilities/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-services
- **FASD Network of Saskatchewan**
www.skfasnetwork.ca

Canada

- **Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse – Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines**
www.ccsa.ca
- **Canada FASD Research Network**
www.canfasd.ca

- **Public Health Agency of Canada**
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/program/ini/fasd-etcaf/index-eng.php>
- **The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada**
<http://sogc.org/publications/alcohol-and-pregnancy-2/>
- **Girls, Women, Alcohol and Pregnancy: Perspectives on FASD Prevention**
<https://fasdprevention.wordpress.com/>

International

- **FASDAY**
www.fasday.com
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/index.html>



How can the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute help your community in recognizing FASD Awareness Day?

- Each year, we host a provincial FASD Awareness Day teleconference to share ideas and network with others in the province. For more information, email info@skprevention.ca.
- We can provide FASD prevention presentations. Email info@skprevention.ca.
- We can send you sample media releases and social media messaging.
- We can provide funding to your Regional FASD Committee to support FASD Awareness Day activities you have planned or help you set up a committee in your area.
- We can provide you with resources (e.g., posters, brochures, tent cards, fact sheets, information cards, t-shirts, and videos). Email info@skprevention.ca for an order form or visit www.skprevention.ca.

Please let us know what you have done in your community to celebrate and/or recognize FASD Awareness Day by emailing info@skprevention.ca.

Sample of Proclamation Letter

FASD

Let's Talk About It

DATE

Dear _____,
(insert name of Chief or Mayor)

On behalf of the _____, we are requesting
(insert name of organization)

that the _____ proclaim September 9 "FASD Awareness Day".
(insert municipality)

FASD is a brain-based disorder resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure. Individuals with FASD can experience a range of mental, physical, learning, and behaviour problems throughout life. It is considered more common than any other disability in the western world, yet remains relatively invisible.

There are no national statistics on FASD in Canada. It is commonly quoted that 1% of the population has an FASD; however, this is considered a conservative estimate. May et. al 2014 found that as high as 2-5% of the population may have an FASD.

When a developing baby is exposed to alcohol, the baby's developing cells may be damaged. There is no known safe amount of alcohol or safe type of alcohol to drink during pregnancy. Alcohol's effects are permanent and lifelong and are different for everyone. Early diagnosis of FASD and support can lead to healthier long-term outcomes for individuals who have FASD.

Join us in increasing understanding and knowledge. Therefore, we are requesting FASD Awareness Day in _____ be proclaimed on September 9. We would appreciate receiving notification of the proclamation by _____.
(insert date)

Respectfully submitted on behalf of _____
(insert signatures of representatives from the group)