

Local Bars and Restaurants Urge Pregnant Women Not to Drink

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Awareness Day is Sept. 9

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All things in moderation, the saying goes, but if you are a pregnant woman no amount of alcohol is known to be safe for the developing baby.

“When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol so does her baby,” said Kenneth Lyons Jones, MD, chief of the Division of Dysmorphology and Teratology in the Department of Pediatrics at University of California, San Diego School of Medicine. “So why take the risk?”

To help get the word out that alcohol and pregnancy don’t mix, volunteers with the Southern California affiliate of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (SoCal NOFAS) are handing out “Pregnant? Don’t Drink” coasters to San Diego area bars and restaurants on Tuesday, September 9th as part of International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day.

Volunteers will include UC San Diego health care professionals as well as parents of children affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Local establishments partnering on the don’t-drink-while-pregnant campaign include:

- → Waypoint Public (North Park)
- → Bamboo Lounge (Hillcrest)
- → Downtown Café (El Cajon)
- → Bistro Sixty (College area)
- → Joycees Cocktails (Spring Valley)
- → KnB Wine Cellars (San Diego)
- → The Junction (El Cajon)
- → Next Door (La Mesa)

“The message we want to get out is that fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are 100 percent preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant,” said Christina Chambers, PhD, MPH, professor of pediatrics and director of clinical research for the Department of Pediatrics, UC San Diego School of Medicine. “We are coming to bars and restaurants where alcohol is served because the time for a woman to think about whether she is drinking in a risky pattern is before becoming pregnant.”



Coasters like the one above will be distributed with information for women about the dangers of drinking while pregnant or trying to conceive.

International FASD Awareness Day is held annually on the ninth day of the ninth month to urge women not to drink during the full nine months of pregnancy.

“We agree with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Surgeon General that there is no safe time to drink during pregnancy or when trying to get pregnant and there is no amount or type of alcohol that is safe to drink during pregnancy,” Chambers said.

Some researchers estimate that 40,000 babies may be born each year in the U.S. with FASD, and the National Institutes of Health rates prenatal alcohol exposure as the nation’s leading preventable cause of birth defects. Symptoms of FASD range from learning difficulties and growth deficits to abnormal facial features to severe cognitive impairment.

“Alcohol can cause problems for a developing baby throughout pregnancy, including during the first trimester before a woman may realize she is pregnant,” Chambers said. “This is troubling because about half of all pregnancies are unplanned.”

Studies also suggest that women of child-bearing age may be trying to keep up with men at bars and parties. “Despite a 30-year education campaign, we are not seeing a decline in binge or heavy drinking among young women,” Chambers said.

Chambers, Jones and colleagues are currently conducting a study to estimate the prevalence of FASD among first graders in San Diego Unified School District and children with the San Diego Regional Center, a private non-profit which provides services to children with developmental disabilities.

To date, more than 1,400 children have been screened. Results of the study will eventually be used to develop area-specific strategies for prevention and treatment. It is estimated that about 1 percent of children may have learning disabilities or other cognitive deficits caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

If interested in obtaining “Pregnant? Don’t Drink” beverage coasters, call the Institute for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Discovery, supported jointly by UC San Diego and Rady Children’s Hospital-San Diego at 858-822-3785.

Families affected by FASD are also invited to attend free support group meetings held on the second Tuesday of every month, hosted by SoCal NOFAS. For information about the support group, call 619-865-4991.

For more information about International FASD Awareness Day, visit www.fasday.com 

In California, free counseling for pregnant women with questions about alcohol is available through MotherToBaby CA by calling 866-626-6847 for English and Spanish speakers.

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