

# ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY

## Fact sheet



### Biggest

**Most common cause of cognitive damage in children**

Alcohol exposure in pregnancy is the most common cause of preventable cognitive deficits among children in Sweden and globally.



### 5%

**Live births affected worldwide, each year**

Alcohol exposure in pregnancy is the most common cause of preventable cognitive deficits among children globally, affecting an estimated 1% to 5% of live births each year.

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**119,000**

**Babies born with FAS each year**

Recent estimates are that worldwide, around 119,000 children are born with FAS each year.



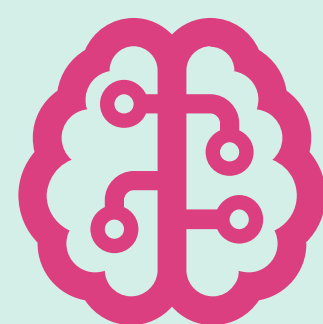
**40%**

**Rise in risk of stillbirth due to alcohol use during pregnancy**

A large study of more than 600,000 births found a 40% increase in likelihood of stillbirth for women who consumed any amount of alcohol compared with those who did not consume any alcohol.

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### Cognition

#### Prenatal alcohol exposure harms cognition

Evidence is clear that almost every cognitive domain that has been evaluated is negatively affected by prenatal alcohol exposure.



### 50%

#### Alcohol exposure to the baby during breastfeeding

About half of all nursing women living in Western nations are exposed to alcohol while breastfeeding and about half of those will breastfeed for 12 months or more.

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## Costs of FAS in Sweden

**The most well-known consequence of prenatal alcohol exposure is foetal alcohol syndrome**

Foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) includes cognitive deficits, abnormal facial features and deficiencies of the central nervous system and growth.

- The incidence of FAS in Sweden has been estimated at 0.1% to 0.3% of all births, or 100-300 cases per year, and for FASD 1% to 3%.
- The cost of FAS to Swedish society is conservatively estimated at €1.4 billion per year.

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## Multiple adverse outcomes

**Heavy alcohol use during pregnancy is an established risk factor for multiple adverse outcomes**

Multiple adverse outcomes include, spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, premature birth, intrauterine growth retardation, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

- Even low-to-moderate alcohol exposure during pregnancy increases the risk for some adverse outcomes.
- Even though the brain is the organ most severely impacted by prenatal alcohol exposure, abnormalities within the heart, kidney, liver, gastrointestinal tract, and the endocrine system can also occur.
- Alcohol appears to be a risk factor for SIDS, specifically when parents sleep with the baby.

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# Alcohol harm bigger than tobacco

**Bigger harm from alcohol than from tobacco exposure during pregnancy**

The effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on foetal development are stronger than those from tobacco use, use of other psychoactive substances and exposure to other hazards such as lead and radiation.

- Possible causal mechanisms include alcohol-induced brain cell death and damage to the DNA of immature male and female reproductive cells, causing changes which can potentially last for generations.

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# Alcohol harm during breastfeeding

**Alcohol does not increase human milk supply and is associated with early cessation of breastfeeding**

- Even low levels of ethanol exposure can disrupt infant sleep patterns and reduce maternal milk production.
- Applying the precautionary principle here would suggest it safest to avoid alcohol exposure while breastfeeding.

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# Alcohol use in women and men

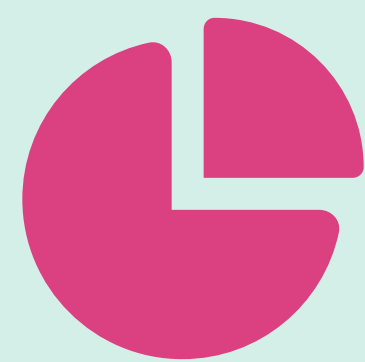
## Alcohol use in the time surrounding pregnancy

- The natural inclination is to perceive alcohol and pregnancy as a problem restricted to pregnancy, and a problem restricted to women.
- **The effects of alcohol on pregnant women and their offspring are related to the alcohol use of both men and non-pregnant women in the general population.**



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**80%**

**Alcohol use in pregnancy is prevalent in Swedish women**

Over 80% of Swedish women consume alcohol during the year prior to pregnancy and 14% consume alcohol at heavy levels. Overall, few women reduce consumption prior to pregnancy recognition.



**Genetic Harm**

**Male alcohol use prior to conception carries risks**

Alcohol use of the father in the pre-conception period may negatively affect the foetus and possibly subsequent generations through genetic modification of sperm.