NEAFAN
Northeast Alberta FASD Network
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NEAFAN NEWSLETTER MAY 2022

Frontline FASD Prevention

The first level of FASD prevention is about raising public awareness through campaigns and other broad strategies. The second level of FASD prevention is about girls and women of childbearing years having the opportunity for safe discussions about reproductive health, contraception, pregnancy, alcohol use, and related issues, with their support networks and healthcare providers. Nurses and other frontline workers are essential to FASD prevention, intervention, and diagnosis.

Health care teams that are FASD-informed are well-prepared to effectively care for people with FASD, their families, and women using substances. Because substance use has wide-ranging effects on many different aspects of life, service providers across a range of health care and social service settings can have an important role in addressing the potential harms of substance use and improving overall health.

International Nurses Day 2022

International Nurses Day is celebrated around the world every May 12, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. During the pandemic we have all had to endure considerable hardship, but our nurses and healthcare workers have gone beyond the call of duty, day after day in life-threatening conditions, as a critical component in of our struggle against COVID-19 and its variants.

This month NEAFAN acknowledges Nurses Week 2022 and the nurses of our healthcare system who steadfastly and selflessly provide Canadians with the care and compassion that ensures our health. A recent report, An Environmental Scan of the Role of Nurses in Preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, presents results of an environmental scan of resources relevant to nursing professionals and nurses' role in addressing alcohol misuse. Gaps in nursing education and practice guidelines regarding defining the nursing role in preventing alcohol-exposed pregnancies were revealed. Findings identified a need to promote adoption among nurses of evidence-based preventive practices to prevent alcohol misuse.

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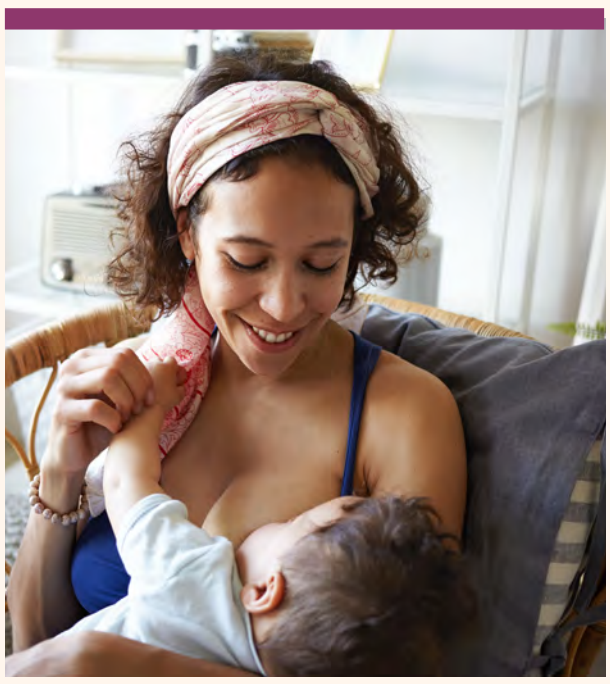
Nurses are in an ideal position to talk to their patients of reproductive age about alcohol use and to encourage the prevention of alcohol-exposed pregnancies. Effective conversations can be efficiently included in the clinical encounter to identify alcohol misuse and offer appropriate follow-up.

Alcohol and Breastfeeding

Although alcohol exposure through the consumption of breast milk does not cause FASD, there is some evidence to indicate that it can negatively affect infant and child development. In recent years, the advice about alcohol use when breastfeeding has changed because of the increased understanding regarding how alcohol passes into breast milk, as well as concern for potential adverse effects on infant and child development. Primary health care providers need to have discussions with women about the effects of consuming alcohol during the lactation period to enable women to make informed decisions about their alcohol use during this time.

Women are advised to follow the evidence-based recommendations in Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines, when not pregnant, pregnant, or in the lactation period, for their own health as well as for fetal and child health. What is known about the effects of alcohol use on lactation, as well as the impact of alcohol use while breastfeeding on infant and child health is summarized in the issue paper: Alcohol and Breastfeeding. This paper summarizes the available evidence on the potential risks of alcohol use while breastfeeding on infant and child health. It includes a link to a brochure which provides information for future parents about the risks associated with alcohol use while breastfeeding, and places to get help. It is hoped such materials will help them to make an informed choice when it comes to drinking alcohol while breastfeeding.

New mothers and health care providers need accurate information about the effects of alcohol intake while breastfeeding. Given the lack of evidence about the potential health effects, it is safest not to drink alcohol when breastfeeding.



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FASD Prevention Strategies Focusing on Prenatal Care

Physicians delivering prenatal health care (PNC) services to women are in a unique position to help prevent or reduce the amount of alcohol consumed during pregnancies and can play an integral role in decreasing the prevalence of FASD.

PNC is often the first point of access of care for women of child-bearing age and a frequently used preventive health care service of universal health care. Physicians delivering PNC should routinely screen for alcohol use in pregnancy, and when they identify pregnant patients who are consuming alcohol, they should refer them to treatment and support programs and link them to community resources.

However, screening and intervention programs implemented in PNC settings may miss a population at extremely high risk for alcohol use during pregnancy. This study investigated prenatal care use among women who use alcohol during pregnancy. Women who give birth to children with FASD often have increased social complexities, including single parenthood, low socioeconomic status, more previous pregnancies, and higher rates of mental health disorders. These social complexities may affect the way they access prenatal care.

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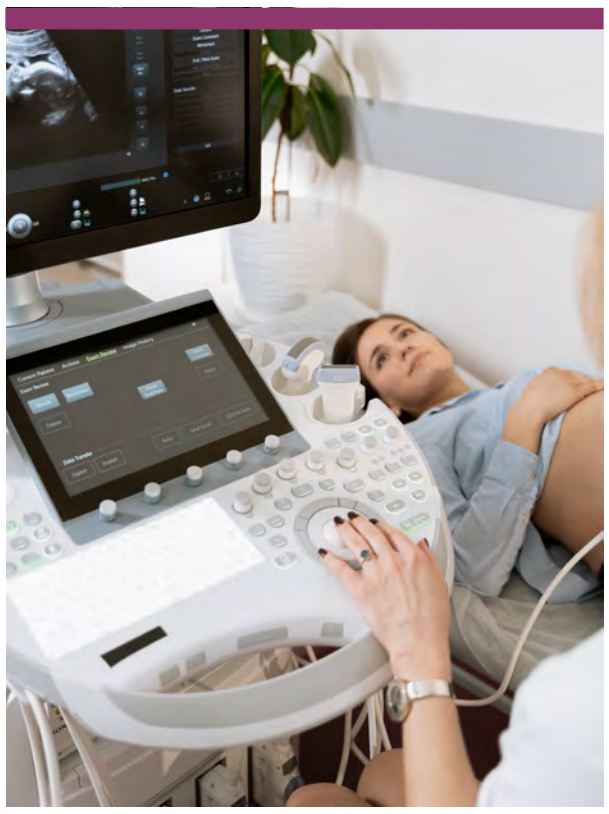

PNC has been shown to be more effective if it begins in the first trimester of pregnancy and regular visits are continued throughout pregnancy. Within FASD prevention strategies focusing on prenatal care, outreach efforts are necessary to reduce the inequities in access to and use of prenatal care by women who may be harder to reach. The North East Alberta FASD Network (NEAFAN), provides outreach and support services for individuals and caregivers. These programs are designed to assist and support individuals affected by FASD and their families/caregivers.

In addition, The Prevention Conversation is an innovative approach that focuses on the unique role healthcare professionals and social service providers can play in engaging women of childbearing age in supportive and non-judgemental conversations about alcohol use and pregnancy. Free training is available through the Alberta FASD Service Networks for anyone interacting with women of childbearing age. To connect directly with a Prevention Conversation facilitator in North East Alberta contact NEAFAN.

CONTACT NEAFAN

NEAFAN wishes all FASD moms a very Happy Mother's Day.

Connect

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Links & Resources

- An Environmental Scan of the Role of Nurses in Preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
- Alcohol and Breastfeeding Paper
- Mixing Alcohol and Breatfeeding brochure
- Prenatal Care Use Among Women Who Use Alcohol Durng Pregancy Study.
- The Prevention Conversation
- Alberta FASD Service Networks
- Contact NEAFAN

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