

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are the most preventable cause of birth defects, and refer to a group of conditions that can occur in a baby whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. The effects can include physical problems and lifelong difficulties with learning and behavior. While it isn't known how many people in the United States have FASDs, studies funded by the [National Institutes of Health](#) estimate that the full range of FASDs might number as high as 1 to 5% of the population.

### Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)

The most severe type of FASD is fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which is caused by heavy drinking during pregnancy. There is no medical test for fetal alcohol syndrome, but it is diagnosed based on the child's signs and symptoms, and whether the mother drank alcohol while pregnant. Signs may include:

- Small head size and abnormal facial features
- Shorter than average height and low body weight
- Hyperactivity, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems
- Vision or hearing problems and nervous system abnormalities

FAS is one of the top three known causes of developmental disabilities, along with spina bifida and Down Syndrome.

### Preventing FASDs

No amount of alcohol is considered safe for a woman to drink during pregnancy, or if she is trying to get pregnant. Binge drinking increases the chances of a baby having FASD. Alcohol is passed to the baby through the umbilical cord, and can cause FASDs as well as premature birth, miscarriage or stillbirth, or sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).



Women who find it difficult to stop drinking during their pregnancy can talk to their healthcare provider about treatment options and support groups.

[The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome \(NOFAS\)](#) offers a [mentoring network](#) for birth mothers who are struggling with addiction or have used alcohol or other drugs while pregnant. Most members have a child or children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

### Helping Children with FASDs

While there is no cure for FASDs, early intervention can help children reach their full potential. Medical care for health problems, behavioral therapies, special education if needed, and a loving, stable home environment can help to reduce the effects of FASDs.

If you, or someone you know, is interested in addiction recovery services, primary care, or mental health care for children or adults, contact InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.

