

## MORE THAN 50% OF WOMEN DRINK ALCOHOL WHILE PREGNANT

For immediate release  
January 26, 2007

A new study by researchers at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research has found that more than half of West Australian women surveyed drank alcohol during pregnancy.

The report, published in the February issue of the international journal */Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research/*, also found that nearly half had not planned their pregnancy, and 80% consumed alcohol in the three months before conception.

Report author Lyn Colvin said the findings have important implications for health promotion.

"Binge drinking among women of child bearing age is of particular concern. The findings that 14.2 percent of women surveyed consumed five or more standard drinks per occasion during the three months prior to pregnancy, and that almost half of the pregnancies were unplanned pregnancies, indicate that many women may have exposed their babies to high levels of alcohol before they were aware of their pregnancy," she said

"It's important that women understand that there is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. We recommend not drinking as the safest option because the impact of alcohol on the fetus depends on so many factors including the stage of pregnancy, the frequency of consumption and the type of beverage consumed."

Ms Colvin said that complications due to drinking during pregnancy can range from the very serious Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to the often less severe but more common Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders which include behavioural and developmental difficulties.

She said it was encouraging that many women who drank alcohol reduced their consumption in the first trimester of pregnancy.

"It suggests to us that with appropriate education, more women will reduce or abstain from consuming alcohol when they are pregnant or might soon become pregnant," she said

"It's also important that while we raise awareness that we don't generate undue fear or guilt. Most pregnancies are healthy, but women also have a right to know about the risks to a baby from alcohol and, if they are drinking, they need to take precautions to prevent unplanned pregnancies."

The findings are based on a survey of 4,839 women taken 12 weeks after delivery. It represents a 10-percent random sample of all non-Indigenous women giving birth in Western Australia.

--Ends--

Media Contact:  
Tammy Gibbs  
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research  
0408 946 698