



# Girls, Alcohol and Pregnancy

## Background and Evidence

When considering Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention for girls, it is helpful to look at trends in girls' alcohol use and in teen pregnancy.

### Girls and Alcohol Use

Over 10 per cent of females in Canada drink alcohol in excess of the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines<sup>(1,3)</sup>. Alcohol use among females is most prevalent for women ages 18 to 19 (overall prevalence of 90.7 per cent). Of 18 to 19 year-old women who drink, 38.8 per cent report drinking five drinks or more in a typical drinking session. This percentage drops significantly as age increases. Recent research shows a number of concerns regarding alcohol use amongst girls:

- The 2008 Canadian Addiction Survey's focus on gender found that 65.6 per cent of girls aged 15 to 17 years reported drinking alcohol in the past year, compared to 58.9 per cent of males of the same age. Of these girls, 27.7 per cent reported heavy monthly drinking<sup>(1)</sup>.
- The 2012-2013 Manitoba Youth Health Survey found that 20 per cent of total student respondents (Grades seven to 12) reported binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours) at least one day in the past month. Prevalence of binge drinking was highest (42 per cent) amongst Grade 12 students<sup>(2)</sup>.
- Youth who use alcohol and drugs earlier in adolescence are more likely to experience lower academic achievement, less than optimal brain development, lower participation in youth activities, increased interpersonal conflicts, less than optimal physical development and health, increased risk of bodily harm and higher risk of alcohol dependency and use of other drugs<sup>(2)</sup>.

These rates suggest numerous opportunities for intervention with girls around their alcohol use. Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines encourage youth to delay drinking at least until their late teen years, and to drink no more than one to two drinks per occasion, and no more than one to two times per week.<sup>(5)</sup> While these guidelines can be helpful as a foundation for intervention, the reality is that many girls do drink, and among girls who do drink, most alternate between periods of abstinence and periodic binge drinking, rather than drinking in moderation on a regular basis.

## Discussing the Impacts of Alcohol Use

Instead of an abstinence-only focus, service providers may choose to focus on reducing harms associated with alcohol use. Heavy drinking has risks and harms for both young men and women, including:

- injuries resulting from assaults
- driving with someone who is impaired
- unplanned sexual activity
- unprotected sex
- sleep disturbances
- negative impacts on relationships
- effects on work or school performance

Young women also face additional risks such as:

- unplanned pregnancy
- increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence
- drink-spiking
- unique long-term health problems such as breast cancer
- interactions between alcohol and mood-altering drugs, which women are more likely to be prescribed

Best practices support approaches that focus on harm reduction, skill-building and individual strengths, rather than those that only provide information and support zero alcohol use <sup>(6)</sup>. Service providers can support and encourage youth to talk to their parents about their alcohol use, address safety concerns (e.g., getting home safely), discuss short and long-term risks of heavy drinking, increase awareness of warning signs associated with alcohol poisoning or possible alcohol abuse and dependence, and support moderate or safer drinking practices.

Many messages targeted at reducing alcohol use in girls and young women emphasize girls' vulnerability, shame, regret, risk and personal safety. In contrast, alcohol industry messaging focuses on alcohol use as an avenue to sexual confidence, freedom and adventure. It also focuses on the need to avoid weight gain while drinking and to consume girly drinks <sup>(7)</sup>. Health care providers can play an important role in providing more balanced information that is relevant or tailored to the concerns, interests and needs of individuals. Brief interventions to reduce at-risk drinking in women have been shown to be effective in reducing the frequency and amount of alcohol consumed. Gerbara et al <sup>(8)</sup> found that many types of brief interventions can be effective for women, including face-to-face discussions and telephone and computer-based interventions. Motivational Interviewing approaches that respond to the current concerns of young women provided opportunities to share information on the effects and possible consequences of alcohol use and discussion of possible strategies to moderate or reduce alcohol use. In Winnipeg, a program called Project CHOICES uses Motivational Interviewing techniques for brief intervention counselling with girls and young women (see referral section for more information).

Given that approximately 75 per cent of adult women consume alcohol <sup>(3)</sup>, supporting increased knowledge and moderate drinking in girls is an important area for preventative intervention. However, service providers working with girls in the areas of contraception, pregnancy and sexuality can also support healthy decision-making and skill-building.

### **Girls and Pregnancy**

We know that over 50 per cent of pregnancies are unplanned, with the highest rates of unplanned pregnancy being in women ages 15 to 24 <sup>(9)</sup>. This means that the highest rate of unintended pregnancy occurs in the same age group of women who are at highest risk of heavy or binge drinking <sup>(1)</sup>. In 2009, about 30 per cent of 15 to 17-year-olds reported having had intercourse, compared with 68 per cent of 18 and 19-year-olds <sup>(10)</sup>. Twenty-six per cent of women ages 15 to 19 reported that they did not always use a method of contraception during intercourse <sup>(13)</sup>. While national teen pregnancy rates continue on a 20-year decline, Manitoba's teen pregnancy rates are higher than the national average, and rates have increased in recent years <sup>(11)</sup>. Service providers looking to prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies can support girls in reducing rates of unplanned pregnancy and, for those who do become pregnant, help to address health concerns including alcohol use over the course of the pregnancy. Many girls who become pregnant are open to interventions supporting healthy pregnancies. While pregnant, girls are more likely to access prenatal care after the first trimester (15 per cent of teens, as compared with four per cent of adults). They are also more likely to attend prenatal classes and less likely than adult women to drink alcohol during pregnancy <sup>(12)</sup>.


A strong body of research suggests that reducing rates of teen pregnancy requires a focus on three areas in which service providers can play an important role:

- 1) enhancing youth development programming and support for economic advancement among girls at risk for unwanted pregnancy
- 2) ensuring girls have access to affordable and effective contraception and reproductive health services
- 3) providing broadly-based sexual health education <sup>(12)</sup>

## What You Can Do To Help

Health care providers can provide youth with the opportunity for safe discussion about reproductive health concerns, contraception, pregnancy, alcohol use and related issues such as sexuality, mental wellness and obesity. Brief interventions can focus on skill building and harm reduction, as well as supporting youths' autonomy by giving them the knowledge, resources and support to make healthy choices around alcohol and contraception. It is important that interventions related to alcohol use and contraception be focused towards boys and young men as well as to girls and young women.

- 1. Help youth reduce at-risk drinking by discussing Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines.** Possible areas for discussion can include safer drinking tips (e.g., not drinking on an empty stomach), understanding what a standard drink is, moderate drinking (defined as one to two drinks) and finding their personal limit (e.g., based on body size and genetics).
- 2. Support the use of effective contraception.** As most youth are not planning to become pregnant, encourage them to use contraception to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. If an individual is using birth control, ensure they are using it properly, and that their chosen birth control method is a good fit for their life. Remember that different types and methods of birth control may be more or less effective for different individuals, including those who have FASD themselves. Some youth might appreciate role-modeling how to have conversations about birth control with partners.
- 3. Support awareness of available and accessible and free emergency contraception (ie. the "morning after pill") and pregnancy testing in your community.** If appropriate, you may also want to discuss how excessive or binge drinking can lead to vomiting, which can reduce the effectiveness of the birth control pill. Make sure youth know where to access emergency contraception or are aware of alternate methods of birth control. If asked, provide information about abortion clinics in your community.
- 4.** Young women are the age group most likely to drink heavily and to have an unintended pregnancy. **Answer questions and concerns honestly about alcohol use before they are aware of being pregnant, and discuss current research findings:** high levels of alcohol consumption clearly harms a fetus, but the research is less clear at lower levels of consumption. Nevertheless, there is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy. If women continue to have concerns, provide them with resources to learn more about FASD.

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5. Drinking while driving or getting into a car with a drunk driver continues to disproportionately be an issue for teens. **Discuss the importance of having a plan to get home safely when alcohol use is planned.** Heavy alcohol use also correlates with higher rates of physical injury and social harm <sup>(4)</sup>. **Discuss ways to make safe and responsible choices and reduce risks of injury and harm when drinking alcohol.**
  6. **Start conversations based on the individual's needs and interests.** Alcohol use and misuse is often tied to other concerns such as trauma, body image, depression, anxiety and smoking. Remember that alcohol use doesn't always happen in isolation. Discuss alcohol use in the context of smoking, marijuana use and other substance use. Some individuals may request information and support related to other substance use first.
  7. Some individuals use alcohol to cope with stress or difficult life circumstances. **Respect that they are doing the best they can, listen to their concerns and support the development of additional ways of coping.** If appropriate, provide information about possible signs of alcohol misuse and addressing alcohol dependence. If an individual identifies that they feel they are misusing alcohol, treatment options can be provided by that time.

## **Resources and Tools for Service Providers**

### **Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines**

<http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/topics/alcohol/drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx>

This website includes information, tools and resources on low-risk drinking for health and safety. While the guidelines are primarily intended for adults, a summary on youth and alcohol is also available.

### **Your Choice for Your Reasons: Youth Pregnancy Options Handbook for Service Providers**

[https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/mcad/had\\_yourchoice.pdf](https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/mcad/had_yourchoice.pdf)

This handbook was published by the Adolescent Parent Interagency Network (APIN) and Healthy Child Manitoba in 2002 and revised in 2009. It offers up-to-date factual information about pregnancy options as a resource for service providers working with youth. It also includes Manitoba resource and referral information.

### **Healthy Child Manitoba- FASD Resources web page**

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/resources.html>

This website contains links to resources about FASD prevention, supporting individuals living with FASD and other general FASD resources. The information has been prepared by Healthy Child Manitoba and can be ordered for free by calling the Healthy Child Manitoba Office: 204-0945-2266; toll free 1-888-848-0140.

### **Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Violence: Tips for Pregnancy Prevention Programs**

[http://www.safestartcenter.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/PDF\\_TipSheetFor\\_Pregnancy.pdf](http://www.safestartcenter.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/PDF_TipSheetFor_Pregnancy.pdf)

Girls who have experienced violence are more likely to use alcohol to cope with trauma, and may be more likely to get pregnant. This tip sheet from the Safe Start National Resource Centre for Children's Exposure to Violence provides a rationale for addressing exposure to violence and recommends strategies to make programs trauma informed.

### **Girl-Centred Approaches to Prevention, Harm Reduction and Treatment**

<http://www.bcewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/GenderingNatFrameworkGirlCentred.pdf>

This is a discussion guide for health care providers and practitioners to stimulate further conversation on gendered approaches to youth prevention, harm reduction and treatment.



### **Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention for Youth: A Practitioner's Guide**

<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Practitioner/YouthGuide/YouthGuide.pdf>

This is a guide to alcohol screening and brief interventions for health and mental health care professionals and others who work with children and adolescents (ages 9 to 18). It was developed by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in the U.S. A pocket guide is also available.

### **Elements of Youth-Friendly Contraceptive and Reproductive Health Services**

<http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/TeenFriendlyHealthVisit.html>

This is a brief overview developed by the Centers for Disease Control. It includes A Teen-Friendly Reproductive Health Visit infographic.

### **Pimotisiwin: A Good Path for Pregnant and Parenting Aboriginal Teens**

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/aboriginal\\_health.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/aboriginal_health.html)

This information comes from the Best Start Resource Centre to help service providers in supporting Aboriginal teens who are pregnant and parenting, as well as their children. To provide continuity, the resource also includes brief information about preventing teen pregnancies. The information will assist in strengthening programs and services in a culturally appropriate manner.

### **Girls, Alcohol and Depression: A Backgrounder for Facilitators of Girls' Empowerment Groups**

[http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/files/alcohol\\_depression\\_1.pdf](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/files/alcohol_depression_1.pdf)

This info sheet has been developed by researchers at the British Columbia Centre for Excellence for Women's Health in collaboration with the Girls Action Foundation to support the work of facilitators of girls' groups. It includes resources for starting conversations with girls about alcohol and related health issues.

### **Addressing the Needs of Women and Girls: Developing Core Competencies for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Service Professionals**

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA11-4657/SMA11-4657.pdf>

This is a resource developed for health professionals by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the U.S. in 2011. It supports creating a gender-responsive and trauma-informed environment.

### **Sexuality and U**

<http://www.sexualityandu.ca>

This link contains accurate, credible and up-to-date information and education on sexual health from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. It includes resources for health professionals, teachers and parents.

### **Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A toolkit for service providers**

[http://master.fnbc.info/sites/default/files/resource-files/Engaging%20and%20Empowering%20Aboriginal%20Youth%20-%20Toolkit%20for%20Service%20Providers\\_0.pdf](http://master.fnbc.info/sites/default/files/resource-files/Engaging%20and%20Empowering%20Aboriginal%20Youth%20-%20Toolkit%20for%20Service%20Providers_0.pdf)

This is a guide for service providers, facilitators, educators, community partners and researchers to help improve their work with Aboriginal youth.

## **Resources and Tools to Share with Girls**

### **Girls, Women and Alcohol: Making Informed Choices**

[http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/alcohol\\_women.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/alcohol_women.pdf)

This is a resource booklet by Healthy Child Manitoba, designed to help girls and women make healthy and well-informed choices about alcohol use - not designed to make girls stop drinking alcohol.

### **Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries: DrinkSense**

<http://www.mbl.ca/drinksense>

The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries DrinkSense website includes the With Child Without Alcohol FASD prevention campaign, including a resource guide available in English, French, Cree and Ojibway that is free to order or download; the Be the Influence program that helps parents have conversations with their children about alcohol; the Be UnDrunk program that encourages young adults to make healthy choices about alcohol use; and links for information & activities on common myths about alcohol use, standard drink sizes, effects of alcohol on the body, guides for responsible entertaining, a mocktail guide and more.

### **Stress Hacks**

[www.stresshacks.ca](http://www.stresshacks.ca)

A website where youth can access information about stress, mental health, strategies for stress management, healthy lifestyle information (including information about alcohol and drugs) and crisis services. Youth can complete self-checks to self-assess for signs of anxiety, depression or stress. Links to resources in Manitoba are listed, and there is an interactive Services Map of Manitoba. Resources and information for families, helpers, and educators are also provided. Stresshacks.ca is managed by the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre.

### **Winnipeg Regional Health Authority: Get Some Condoms**

[www.getsomecondoms.com](http://www.getsomecondoms.com)

Aimed at youth, this website provides information on choices about having sex, birth control, pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, STI's and Manitoba resources.



### **Girl Talk**

<http://grtlk.wordpress.com>

This is an interactive website that provides information to girls and their parents on alcohol-related choices and consequences for underage drinkers. The site also includes a visual graphic Virtual Girl illustrating some of the effects of alcohol on the body for girls and young women.

### **Sexuality and U**

<http://www.sexualityandu.ca/>

This page contains accurate, credible, and up-to-date information and education on sexual health from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

### **Unwasted.ca**

<http://unwasted.ca>

This is a website that discusses the truth behind drugs, gambling, and alcohol. It includes information on how to identify possible signs of alcohol abuse.

### **Native Youth Sexual Health Network**

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com>

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network works on issues related to healthy sexuality, cultural competency, youth empowerment, reproductive justice and sex positivity, by and for Native youth. You can download a two-part sexual health toolkit, which includes information on healthy relationships, birth control and emergency contraception, sexuality, effects of alcohol and drugs and traditional views on sexual health.

### **Motherisk**

<http://www.motherisk.org>

This website includes up-to-date information for professionals and mothers about alcohol, drugs and pregnancy. A toll-free helpline is available at 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636). The phone line is available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and offers information in English or French, based on continuing research and study by Motherisk's specialized team of physicians, psychologists, pharmacologists and counselors.

## From Evidence-to-Practice: Self-Assessment and Discussion Questions

The following questions are intended to support direct-service providers, program leaders and system planners in reflecting on their current practices, policies and procedures, related to pregnant women and mothers who use substances. These questions can be used for self assessment or as a tool for group discussion and collective reflective practice:

1. What do we know about Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines, especially as they pertain to youth? Are we aware of alcohol and sex-specific health risks and are we sharing this information with youth?
2. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance by women in Canada and rates of heavy drinking are increasing among girls and young women. How does this fit with our experience as service providers? Do we see certain sub-populations in our program or service that appear to be consuming alcohol at higher rates than others?
3. As service providers, do we create a safe environment for youth to discuss alcohol consumption? How do we support access to and effective use of contraception, if at all? What could we be doing differently?
4. Does our organization provide a youth-friendly environment? Do we make information available about youth services in the community? Do we involve youth in program development and evaluation?
5. Pathways to substance use differ for girls and boys. Girls face distinct challenges, such as higher rates of depression and trauma, poor body image, risk of pregnancy and so forth. How might we reach girls and young women at different levels of development and risk?
6. When we work with youth, are we able to involve their support networks, including friends, partners and parents? What are some of the ethical challenges that might arise when we do this (e.g., confidentiality, safety)?
7. As service providers, what are our own values and beliefs about underage substance use? Does our organization have a formal policy on abstinence-based or harm reduction-based approaches to alcohol and drug use? How does this inform our work with youth?
8. Alcohol advertisers target girls and young women through concerns about appearance, especially weight gain and a desire to connect with others. What can be done in our program or service to reduce media influence and strengthen protective factors for girls and young women?

## Referrals

### **Project CHOICES**

[www.projectchoices.ca](http://www.projectchoices.ca)

This is a Winnipeg-based program for girls and women, supporting healthy choices around alcohol use, pregnancy and birth control. Participants are offered up to four sessions with a counsellor and a visit with a nurse to get information about birth control options. Call NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre at 204-940-8611 or Klinik Community Health Centre at 204-784-4072.

### **Teen Clinics**

[www.teenclinic.ca](http://www.teenclinic.ca)

Teen Clinics offer free and confidential health and medical services for youth. The clinics are held in schools and community health centres throughout Manitoba. Visit the website for a list of locations.

### **Teen Talk**

[www.teentalk.ca](http://www.teentalk.ca)

Teen Talk is a youth health education program, providing services for youth from a harm reduction, prevention education perspective. Teen Talk focuses on sexuality, reproductive health, body image, substance use awareness, mental health, issues of diversity and anti-violence issues. Teen Talk provides workshops for youth throughout Manitoba; a peer support program; and training, support and resources for educators and service providers.

### **Directory of Youth Addictions Services**

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/addictions/youth.html>

All provincially funded addictions agencies and programs are listed on this website, including their contact information, purpose and eligibility criteria.

**Provincial Central Intake – Youth Addictions Service: 1-877-710-3999**

### **Directory of Adult Addictions Services**

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/addictions/adult.html>

All provincially funded addictions agencies and programs for adults are listed on this website, including their contact information, purpose, and eligibility criteria.

**Manitoba Addictions Helpline- Adult Addictions Services Information:**

1-855-662-6605

### **Addictions Foundation of Manitoba**

[www.afm.mb.ca](http://www.afm.mb.ca)

This website lists Manitoba addictions programs and services for adults, youth, families and communities. Courses, workshops, and other resources are also listed.

### **YASU- the Youth Addictions Stabilization Unit**

Centralized Intake- 1-877-710-3999

YASU is a designated facility providing non-medical detox and stabilization services for youth ages 12-17. Youth who access the Involuntary Program have been apprehended by police under the Youth Drug Stabilization (Support For Parents) Act. Youth can also access the program voluntarily. Services are available in Winnipeg and Thompson.

### **Youth Mobile Crisis**

Winnipeg Youth Mobile Crisis Team- 204-949-4777

Thompson Youth Mobile Crisis Team- 1-866-242-1571

Interlake-Eastern RHA Youth Mobile Crisis Services- 1-877-499-8770 or 204-482-5376

Youth Mobile Crisis provides on-the-phone and mobile in-person crisis support to youth and their supports. Operating times for crisis lines vary between regions.

### **InSight Mentor Program**

A long term, intensive outreach program for women (age 18 and up) who are pregnant or recently postpartum, use substances and are ineffectively connected to community resources. InSight offers women a three-year relationship with a professional mentor who provides practical supports, connection to community resources, and caring support for women to reach their goals. InSight uses a harm reduction and trauma-informed approach. InSight aims to reduce alcohol-exposed pregnancy and increase connections to community resources and services (including health care, basic needs, housing and addiction treatment) for participants and their children.

InSight services are offered in six Manitoba communities: Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie, Dauphin, The Pas, Flin Flon and Thompson. For more information on the program and contact details, visit <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/insight.html> or call the Healthy Child Manitoba Office at 204-945-2266 or toll free 1-888-848-0140.

### **The Mothering Project (Manito Ikwe Kagiikwe)**

A single-access site located at the Mount Carmel Clinic in Winnipeg, the Mothering Project uses an evidence-based philosophy of care that is women-centred, trauma-informed, culturally safe, harm reduction-focused and supports all types of mothering. The Mothering Project supports women (age 18 and up) who are pregnant or have young children, use substances and are impacted by systemic marginalization. Program goals are to support women's health and wellness, healthy pregnancies, children's health and development, family preservation and providing services to a woman and her whole family. The Mothering Project offers drop-in programs, access to prenatal and health care on-site, food security programs, traditional ceremonies and crafts, access to elders, parenting supports, space for family visits and advocacy for needed community services. For more information, contact the Program Manager: 204-589-9409.

### **Healthy Baby Program**

The Manitoba Prenatal Benefit provides pregnant women and girls with a net income of less than \$32,000 with a monthly cheque of up to \$81.41 to help buy healthy foods during pregnancy. To download an application form, visit:



<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/mpb.html>, or phone Healthy Child Manitoba at 204-945-1301; toll free 1-888-848-0140.

Healthy Baby Community Support Programs are offered across the province for women and girls who are pregnant or have a baby under the age of one. These drop-in group programs offer information, support and resources on prenatal and postnatal nutrition and health, breastfeeding, parenting tips, lifestyle choices and the opportunity to connect with other parents. For a complete list of programs, visit: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/csp.html>.

**Villa Rosa**

[www.villarosa.mb.ca](http://www.villarosa.mb.ca)

Villa Rosa is a prenatal and postnatal residence in Winnipeg, offering a wide variety of programs, including education, life skills training, counselling and access to community resources such as health care and elders in a safe and nurturing environment. Villa Rosa's mission is to provide support to mothers, babies and their families during and after pregnancy.

**Klinic Crisis Line (24/7)**

204-786-8686; toll free 1-888-322-3019; TTY: 204-784-4097

**Manitoba Suicide Line (24/7)**

1-877-435-7170 (1-877-HELP-170); TTY: 204-784-4097; [www.reasonolive.ca](http://www.reasonolive.ca)

**Kids Help Phone (national help line)**

1-800-668-6868

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