

MEDIA RELEASE

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Children in Scotland urges Scottish Government to highlight risks of drinking while pregnant

In advance of today's Scottish Government debate on alcohol, Children in Scotland is calling on the government to support and promote the message not to drink alcohol during pregnancy or when trying to conceive.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can result in Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in children. Both are incurable but entirely preventable. The negative affects associated with the conditions will follow these children into adulthood.

Dr Jonathan Sher, director of policy, research and practice development at Children in Scotland, said: "There are many conditions and illnesses that children have which cannot be foreseen or avoided. Unlike these, FASD can be eradicated by behaviour change. Unfortunately parents are confused by the public health messages coming from the various medical bodies, research facilities and the Scottish Government. The government must show clear leadership on this issue and do more to promote the advice that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can harm your child."

"All parents want what is best for their children but they need information and support to make the right choices. Scotland's drinking culture means that that information and support needs to be even more visible. Introducing labels to alcohol products made by companies based in Scotland warning women of the dangers of drinking while pregnant is just one of the many ways that the Scottish Government can influence public thinking on this issue for the good of all children."

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the name for the various types and degrees of brain and nervous system damage that is caused by women who drink alcohol during pregnancy. The extreme condition consisting of all

symptoms is called Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

Not all foetuses develop Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder as a result of exposure to alcohol, but it currently is unknowable which babies will be harmed.

However, if Scotland reflected the World Health Organisation statistics, 35 children would be diagnosed with FAS every year and over 560 children with FASD. Yet recent figures show as few as five children a year are being diagnosed with FAS, and none are being diagnosed with FASD.

Eileen Calder, GINA (Gender Issues Network on Alcohol) project officer at Alcohol Focus Scotland said: “FASD is a reality for many Scottish children and their families. It is not something that goes away. Children with FASD, but particularly with FAS, are likely to need intensive care and support all of their lives. The cost is unacceptable regardless of how you measure it.”

“Children can be damaged for life, families have to support these children for life, and Scottish service providers from education, health, social care and justice systems will often be dealing with the complex needs of these children for life. The government and we as a nation need to start taking this message seriously.”

Notes for editors:

- Eileen Calder had four children placed with her for adoption. After the children arrived three were diagnosed with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.
- The Chief Medical Officer for Scotland advises that alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy. Occasional drinking – which would be a maximum of 1-2 units once or twice during the whole of pregnancy – should not affect the developing baby, but on the whole, alcohol should be avoided.
- The Scottish Government Debate on alcohol will be held at 2.55pm today (25.10.07) in the Scottish Parliament.
- Children in Scotland is Scotland’s national children’s agency, bringing together voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals to improve the lives of Scotland’s children and their families.

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