

# Obstetricians Often Overlook Alcohol Consumption in Pregnancy

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(PhysOrg.com) -- One in every two pregnant Australian woman still consume alcohol during pregnancy, according to a study in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The responsibility of providing accurate information about the harmful effects of alcohol and its lifelong effects on the child falls on obstetricians and other health professionals.

And yet, almost half of the obstetricians interviewed said they did not routinely ask about alcohol consumption in pregnancy.

An editorial by Professor Elizabeth Elliot from the University of Sydney titled "Alcohol and Pregnancy: the Pivotal Role of the Obstetrician", discusses the state of awareness about the adverse effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the obstetricians' participation in educating against maternal drinking.

Only 16% of the obstetricians routinely provided information about the consequences of alcohol in pregnancy, while only 5% gave advice which were consistent with the latest guidelines of The National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) - which states that, for pregnant women, 'no drinking is the safest option'.

Professor Elliot says, "Failure to provide information about the dangers of alcohol consumption in the antenatal consultation represents a lost opportunity. Accurate recording of antenatal alcohol exposure will help identify children who require pediatric assessment, since the effects of alcohol may not be obvious at birth."

"More importantly, identifying the women who are unable to stop drinking provides an important opening for the management of problem drinking and prevention of exposure to alcohol in future pregnancies," added Professor Elliot.

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been associated with increased risks of miscarriage, stillbirth, intrauterine growth restriction, pre-term birth and low birth-weight. However, the best known adverse effect of alcohol exposure on the fetus is the fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) – which is associated with a wide range of birth defects and ongoing educational, behavioral and psychological problems.

This paper is published in the June 2008 issue of Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (Vol. 48, Issue 3, 2008).

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