

GEORGE HERALD

9 SEPT 2017

<http://www.georgeherald.com/News/Article/LifeStyle/your-unborn-baby-drinks-with-you-20170908>



YOUR UNBORN BABY DRINKS WITH YOU

South Africa has the highest prevalence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in the world - more than 14 times the global average. Photo per illustration: Zolani Sinxo

WESTERN CAPE NEWS - On Saturday 9 September, South Africans will join people across the globe to observe International Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Day to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

South Africa has the highest Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Fasd) prevalence rate, ranging from 29 to 290 per 1 000 live births. This is according to a study conducted by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (Farr) in June 2016.

A Fasd task team at Stellenbosch University also revealed that for every 1 000 babies born in the Western Cape Province, 55 are born with Fasd, with communities such as Wellington, Vredenburg, and Saldanha having the highest recorded instances.

Fasd is an umbrella term used for a group of permanent, life-long and irreversible conditions caused by the effects of alcohol on an unborn baby. When a woman drinks alcohol during her pregnancy she puts her unborn baby at risk of being born with multiple disabilities.

The Western Cape Department of Health warned that even though Fasd is completely preventable, there's no cure for this condition. Any woman can have a baby with Fasd if she drinks alcohol while pregnant, as it affects people across racial and socio-economic groups.

The following features are required for making a clinical diagnosis by a trained medical specialist:

- Small head size;
- Growth retardation before and after birth (height and weight);

- Intellectual disability;
- Specific facial features such as long, smooth upper lip and small openings of the eye (called palpebral fissures);
- Organ anomalies, e.g. heart defects.

Sue Du Toit, George Child Welfare director, says the main challenge for children who have Fasd is education, as this strongly affects the child's learning ability.

"Children with Fasd have a variety of learning, behavioural and psychological problems. They become hyperactive and their concentration is very limited, which causes them to have low self-esteem," says Du Toit.

The only advice she wants to give pregnant women is not to drink at all, because the more mothers drink, the more children are affected.

"In my opinion, it should be a criminal offence for pregnant women to drink, as this destroys the future of a child. We need to break this cycle.

"If you are pregnant, don't drink at all. Don't drink at all."