

# How Many Women Are Really Drinking While Pregnant?

National Survey on Drug Use & Health

<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm>

2009 National Survey on Drug Use & Health - Full Report (HTML)

3, Alcohol Use, Pregnant Women

<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k9NSDUH/2k9Results.htm#3.1.3>

"Among pregnant women aged 15 to 44, an estimated 10.0 percent reported current alcohol use, 4.4 percent reported binge drinking, and 0.8 percent reported heavy drinking. These rates were significantly lower than the rates for nonpregnant women in the same age group (54.4, 24.5, and 5.5 percent, respectively). Binge drinking during the first trimester of pregnancy was reported by 11.9 percent of pregnant women aged 15 to 44. All of these estimates by pregnancy status are based on data averaged over 2008 and 2009. The 2008-2009 estimate for first-trimester binge drinking is higher than in 2006-2007, when it was 6.6 percent."

This blurb has often been shortened by speakers, trainers, and writers as follows:

**"10% of pregnant women drink alcohol."** That statement gives the impression that 90% of pregnant women are not drinking. **Not true.**

Note that "pregnant women" includes women in their first trimester who have just found out that they are pregnant up to women who are in the last week of their third trimester ready to deliver anytime. The survey breaks down the category of pregnant women by trimester. The question is whether they have had anything to drink in the past 30 days. If you look at the data for women who KNOW they are pregnant, in their first trimester, who REPORT they consumed alcohol in the previous 30 days, you will see that the figure is actually 23.7%, and that number has gone up from 19% as reported in the SAMHSA publication "Substance Use Among Women During Pregnancy and Following Childbirth" (<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/135/PregWoSubUse.htm>). from data combined from 2002 through 2007.

Go to <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/systems.htm#NSDUH> Click on "Public use files" Under "analyze online" SDA drop down menu, choose the latest NSDUH survey (2008) and log on as a guest. Variables can be found in the drop down menu on the left. Under "non-core" I found "recoded pregnancy and health care" and under that I found the variable "TRIMEST" for current trimester of pregnancy-female, U assigned this variable to the FILTER box and type 1 in the parentheses to count the women in their first trimester. Under "core substance abuse" I found "alcohol," then the variable ALREC for "time since last alcoholic beverage." Click the box to show percentages. Run the table.

**Results: 23.7% of women who know they are pregnant (1st trimester) report that they consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.**

Only 20% of women in their first trimester report that they do not drink (last drink was more than a year ago). A scan of this report can be viewed here:  
<http://come-over.to/FAS/PDF/NSDUH2008tablePregDrink.pdf>

In the second box, you see that 55.8% of women in their first trimester had their last drink more than 30 days ago but within the past 12 months. This is similar to the statistic in another government study that shows 54.9% of women of childbearing age who are either trying to get pregnant or not trying not to get pregnant are currently drinking alcohol. See *Alcohol Consumption Among Women Who Are Pregnant or Who Might Become Pregnant --- United States, 2002*, CDC Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report. 2004;53(50) <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5350a4.htm>

**So that 10% figure is very misleading. We should use the 23.7% figure** representing women who are willing to admit to their alcohol use. Keep in mind that

Another thing to note in the very first quote from the survey report regarding binge drinking during the first trimester. This looks like binge drinking increased dramatically in the past few years. According to the March of Dimes report, "Beginning in 2006, binge alcohol use is defined as having four or more drinks on at least one occasion during the past month. Prior to 2006, binge alcohol use is defined as having five or more drinks on at least one occasion during the past month." It is still a disturbing statistic - 11.9% of women in their first trimester are binge drinkers.

A web survey on a fertility site shows that 23% of pregnant women admit they are drinking alcohol. <http://www.growingyourbaby.com/2010/10/12/poll-nearly-quarter-of-pregnant-women-drink-alcohol/>

Another issue to keep in mind is the validity of self-reporting of alcohol use by women who are pregnant. There may be a decrease in self-reporting "under the burden of social stigma." Chaya G. Bhuvanewar, M.D., Grace Chang, M.D., M.P.H., Lucy A. Epstein, M.D., and Theodore A. Stern, M.D. Alcohol Use During Pregnancy: Prevalence and Impact *Prim Care Companion J Clin Psychiatry*. 2007; 9(6): 455–460.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2139915/pdf/i1523-5998-9-6-455.pdf>

(This is a good article that could be shared with physicians.)

Whenever you see incorrect or misleading "facts" about the rate of alcohol use during pregnancy, I urge you to send the author the correct information, with citations. You could just forward this article.

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Information compiled by Teresa Kellerman for the National Association of FASD State Coordinators, November 15, 2010.

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