

# Alcohol in pregnancy warning

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Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can be more damaging to an unborn child than smoking or consuming other potential toxins, according to a leading expert on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Health experts will today meet with 50 federal politicians in Canberra to urge them to support a \$37 million plan to prevent and treat foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which is the most common preventable cause of developmental disability in Australia.

Professor Elizabeth Elliott, a paediatrician who works at the University of Sydney and The Children's Hospital at Westmead, said many women and health professionals were unaware of the damage alcohol could cause to a developing foetus.

"It's a nasty toxin and it's much nastier than a lot of the other things that people worry about in pregnancy like soft cheeses, or pates or smoking. They don't cause this kind of permanent brain damage, although they can cause nasty infections, etc," she said.

Professor Elliott said the disorder was often undiagnosed but could cause lifelong problems for sufferers. "At the end of the day these children have problems with learning, behaviour, development, growth and really often require a tremendous amount of support from education and from the society."

Adelaide mother Sue Miers realised there was something unusual about her 21-month-old foster daughter soon after she began caring for her. Ms Miers said the girl could not learn from her mistakes.

"Cause and consequences - touching a hot stove every day and going back and doing it again and again, no matter what you said how you told her. Not learning from her mistakes, really hypersensitive to noise, to touch," she said.

Ms Miers read an article about foetal alcohol syndrome when the girl was 10 years old and unsuccessfully sought a medical diagnosis and assistance.

In the end she had to travel to Canada to get medical help. Ms Mier's foster daughter is now in her 30s and still requires ongoing support.

The action plan developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education calls for a national education program about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy, warning labels on alcohol containers and improved diagnosis and support for sufferers of the disorder.

Foundation chief executive Michael Thorn said the disorder was hidden a disability which the government had the opportunity to bring to community attention.

"Government can move swiftly to adopt the plan's recommendations by staying the course on its commitment to introduce mandatory pregnancy alcohol warning labels, adopting the FASD diagnostic instrument and by funding FASD services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme," Mr Thorn said

Read more: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/alcohol-in-pregnancy-warning-20120911-25qs7.html#ixzz26J7itQoE>