

25 000 babies born with FAS annually in SA

Recent research estimated that 25 000 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) every year in South Africa. This is the highest reported incidence in the world, a shocking figure when considering FAS can be prevented.

There is conclusive scientific evidence that certain maternal patterns of drinking during pregnancy are associated with substantial risk of physical and psychological harm to the unborn child. (Florey 1992)

This evidence generally relates to heavy drinking, however The Industry Association for Responsible Alcohol Use (ARA) urges expecting mothers to err on the side of caution and preferably not to consume alcohol while pregnant.

Caused solely by the consumption of alcohol while pregnant, FAS affects all races, genders and socio-economic groups worldwide. With no cure, prevention is paramount.

Establishment of Foundation for Alcohol Related Research

"Harm associated with maternal drinking is preventable and can be successfully addressed through targeted approaches to policy and prevention, including education and awareness," said ARA spokesperson, Adrian Botha.

For this reason, ARA facilitated the establishment of the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) in August 1996. In an effort to educate the public professional bodies, such as FARR have issued specific recommendations around drinking while pregnant.

"Even a moderate amount of alcohol may increase the risk of miscarriage or physical and mental problems in a baby. This means that any amount of alcohol, whether taken casually or regularly while pregnant, can cause FAS. If you are pregnant, or planning to have a baby, do not take any form of alcohol. As much as one glass of alcohol might harm your unborn child," says CEO of FARR, Leana Olivier.

In an effort to reduce the problem, ARA will invest an additional R1.8 million in FARR this year to assist that organisation in its important work.

For more information on ARA, go to www.ara.co.za.