

# To drink or not while pregnant? that is the question

Pregnant women are now being told that it is safe to drink a daily glass of wine adding more confusion to the advice metered out to women.

Britain's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) now says that women can drink up to 1.5 units of alcohol a day without harming their unborn baby which is a total contradiction to the Department of Health advice that mothers-to-be should not drink at all.

Is it any wonder women are confused about which set of advice to follow?

A draft NICE document says the evidence behind the Department of Health's call for abstinence is 'unclear'.

NICE gives the Government public health advice and guidance.

NICE advisers, who include doctors and midwives have come up with this latest guidance after reviewing a series of studies on drinking in pregnancy, and say other than possibly increasing the risk of miscarriage, it appears small amounts of alcohol do not harm the unborn baby.

They suggest that instead of cutting out alcohol altogether, pregnant women should limit their intake to 1.5 units a day and, possible, avoid it in the first three months of pregnancy.

A small glass of wine counts as one unit, as does half a pint of ordinary strength lager, while a bottle of 'alcopop' counts as 1.5 units.

NICE says it anticipates the Department of Health to offer 'clear advice' on the issue.

However the Department of Health maintains its current advice to avoid alcohol altogether if you are pregnant or trying to conceive, is 'straightforward' and 'simple'.

Experts say such mixed messages will only serve to confuse pregnant women.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy does pose dangers such as foetal alcohol syndrome, which affects around 100 babies a year and causes low birth weight, flattened features, heart and kidney abnormalities, deafness and brain damage.

As many as 7,000 British babies a year are affected by the less serious foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which causes attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity and poor co-ordination.

The British Medical Association says that pregnant women who drink as little as a small glass of wine a day should be counselled over their consumption and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists says that abstinence is the 'safest option'.