

MEDIA RELEASE

Nearly 15% of women reported drinking during pregnancy as alcohol access expands across Ontario

(June 9, 2026) New research published in [Alcohol and Alcoholism](#) found that 14.7% of women reported drinking alcohol during their most recent pregnancy. Based on data from almost 6,000 Ontario adults, the study also found that misconceptions about alcohol use during pregnancy remain common.

Prenatal exposure to alcohol can result in a lifelong developmental disability known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). While researchers in this study found that awareness of FASD was relatively high among both women (87.2%) and men (80.6%), misconceptions about alcohol use in pregnancy still remain.

Experts agree that there is no known safe amount, type, or time to consume alcohol during pregnancy. Any amount of alcohol can affect the health of both the mother and baby. Yet, some respondents in this study still believe that certain amounts of alcohol can be consumed without risk of harming the health of the unborn child.

Recent work from the Canada FASD Research Network estimate the prevalence of FASD to be 8% in the North American general population, and at least 4% in Canada (comparatively, the prevalence of autism is estimated to be 1.5% in Ontario and 1.8% in Canada, according to a [2025 study](#)). Misinformation surrounding the risks of alcohol use in pregnancy is just one of the factors influencing these high rates of FASD.

FASD is a preventable disability if women and girls have tailored supports to encourage healthy pregnancies. There are many reasons someone may drink alcohol while pregnant. Experts stress that the solution is not as simple as telling women not to drink during pregnancy but should also consider policies and practices that support women's health and wellbeing more broadly.

These findings come amid a period of significant alcohol policy liberalization in Ontario. Since 2024, the province has expanded alcohol sales to thousands of convenience, grocery, and big-box stores, substantially increasing the availability and visibility of alcohol in communities across Ontario. Most recently, the government announced a temporary extension of alcohol service until 4 a.m. during the FIFA World Cup. Together, these

measures reflect a trend toward increased normalization and accessibility of alcohol at a time when public health experts continue to call for stronger action to prevent alcohol-related harms.

Research consistently shows that alcohol policies influence population drinking patterns. Measures such as warning labels, public education campaigns, pricing policies, restrictions on marketing, and controls on availability can reduce alcohol-related harms and support healthier pregnancies.

Quotes:

"For too long, the conversation about prenatal alcohol exposure has focused on individual women rather than the conditions that influence alcohol use in the first place. Preventing prenatal alcohol exposure requires coordinated action across public health, healthcare, education, and alcohol policy. This is why the current National FASD Framework Bill is so important. It would provide the leadership needed to align these efforts, improve public awareness, support evidence-based prevention, and ensure all Canadians receive consistent, accurate information." **Kathy Unsworth, Executive Director, CanFASD**

"Alcohol use during pregnancy is influenced by many factors, such as pregnancy recognition, knowledge of the risks, and experiences of trauma. Researchers, community advocates, and service providers continue to work across Canada to enhance awareness and supports that will prevent FASD. We continue to need multilevel action, accompanied by evidence-based alcohol policies and child welfare policies that prioritize both women's and children's health." **Nancy Poole, Prevention Lead, CanFASD**

About FASD:

FASD stands for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It is a lifelong disability that affects the brain and body of people who were exposed to alcohol in the womb. Each person with FASD has both strengths and challenges, and will need special supports to help them succeed with many different parts of their daily lives. Find out more about the disability on the [CanFASD website](#).

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