

# REBUILDING AND RECLAIMING THE FUTURE

APRIL 2007

## Women and Alcohol Abuse

New Orleans has a reputation as a party town. But for women, the effects of frequent alcohol consumption can have long-term health consequences. Combined data from 2004 and 2005 indicate that 7.7 percent of persons aged 12 or older (an estimated 18.7 million annually) were dependent on or abused alcohol in the past year. Males were twice as likely as females to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year (10.5 vs. 5.1 percent). Though women are less likely

to abuse alcohol than men, the effects of alcohol abuse are more severe in women. Among the heaviest drinkers, women equal or surpass men in the number of problems that result from their drinking. For example, female alcoholics have death rates 50 to 100 percent higher than those of male alcoholics, including deaths from suicides, alcohol-related accidents, heart disease and stroke, and liver cirrhosis. The amount of alcohol consumption linked



with premature death is lower for women than for men. For women, the risk of death starts to increase after two drinks a day vs. 4 drinks for men. Alcohol consumption increases a woman's risk for breast cancer. Compared to women who drink little or no alcohol, women who consume 3—4 drinks a day experience a 35% increase in their risk for breast cancer. As women's health advocates, we must include alcohol as a key women's health issue.

### Did you know?

- Alcoholic women die at a rate 5 times greater than non-alcoholic women.
- In 1998, 58.8% of women age 15-44 drank alcohol while pregnant.
- Alcohol use during pregnancy is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation in the United States.
- An estimated 4.6 Million women are alcohol dependent in the United States.

## Pregnancy and Alcohol Use

Attitudes on drinking alcohol during pregnancy vary widely. Roughly one in five women drink alcohol during their pregnancy. One in thirty women drink frequently or binge drink during pregnancy. Fifteen percent of women do not know that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is harmful. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Many women do not learn they are pregnant for several weeks after conception during which

time they many drink alcohol. In February 2005, U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona released recommendations that pregnant women completely abstain for drinking alcohol emphasizing that there is "No amount of alcohol can be considered safe during pregnancy". As a known teratogen, alcohol is the leading known cause of preventable



birth defects. Alcohol crosses the placenta and can have long term effects on the fetus including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) (see next page). Alcohol consumption during pregnancy increase the risk of miscarriage, still birth, and low birth weight. These negative outcomes are 100% preventable by abstaining from alcohol use during pregnancy.

1440 Canal Street  
STE 2301, TW-19  
New Orleans, LA  
70112—2824

Ph: 504-988-3539  
Fax: 504-988-3540  
E-mail: [mch@tulane.edu](mailto:mch@tulane.edu)

*We're on the  
web!*

[www.sph.tulane.edu/mch](http://www.sph.tulane.edu/mch)

### *Thank You*

to our MCPHLT  
Executive Committee  
Members and staff for  
your work and support!

Maya Begalieva, MD, PhD  
Neil Boris, MD  
Mark Dal Corso, MD,  
MPH  
Tom Farley, MD, MPH  
Carolyn Johnson, PhD  
Gretchen Clum, PhD  
Jeanette Magnus, MD,  
PhD

Jenny Hixon, MPH  
Jenn Price

## *Volunteer Opportunities*

### **March of Dimes**

March of Dimes aims to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality. If you are interested in volunteering with the March of Dimes, please e-mail us at [LA367@marchofdimes.com](mailto:LA367@marchofdimes.com) or call us at (225) 295-0655.

### **Families Helping Families New Orleans**

Our mission is to enable and empower Louisiana families of individuals with disabilities through an effective coordi-

nated network of Resources, Support, and Services. For more information contact 1-504-888-9111 or 1-800-766-7736 (toll free) E-mail: [info@thfgno.org](mailto:info@thfgno.org)

### **The Arc of Louisiana**

The Arc of Louisiana advocates for and with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families that they shall live to their fullest potential.

## *Breastfeeding: What Every Public Health Student Should Know February 5th, 2007*

Sure, we all know that breastfeeding is important. But can you explain why? What should a public health professional know about breastfeeding? On February 5th, 2007, the MCPHLT program hosted Ashley Chin, PhD, MPH, MS for a lecture titled, "Breastfeeding: What Every Public Health Student Should Know". Dr. Chin emphasized that human milk is considered the gold standard for infant feeding providing unique nutrition to the infant. Topics covered included the unique properties of human milk, benefits for baby, bene-



Happy Valentine's Day

fits for mom, benefits for society, racial and ethnic disparities in breastfeeding rates, history of breastfeeding policy, and Louisiana breastfeeding resources.

Students from the School of Medicine, Public Health, and Xavier University Pharmacy program attended. Attendees also signed Valentines which were sent to local lactation consultants to support their efforts promoting breastfeeding. The Tulane MCPHLT program plans to continue providing in depth training on MCH topics in the future. Stay on the lookout!

## *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*

Alcohol abuse during pregnancy is leading known



preventable cause of mental retardation and birth defects in the United States. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder encompasses a range of effects that can occur

when a woman drinks alcohol during her pregnancy. Included within FASD is the commonly know Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). FASD can cause physical, mental, behavioral, and educational developmental delays.

FAS, the most severe manifestation of FASD, causes abnormal facial features and central nervous system problems. The CDC estimates that FAS effects .2 to 1.5 per 1,000 live births in the US. Close to 40,000 infants each year are born with FASD, more than Spina Bifida, Down Syndrome and Muscular Dystrophy combined. All drinks with alcohol can hurt a fetus. A 12-ounce can of beer has as much alcohol as a 4-ounce glass of wine or a 1-ounce shot of liquor. FASDs last a lifetime—there is no cure. FASDs are 100% preventable—if a woman does not drink alco-