



NORTH CAROLINA ENGAGEMENT CENTER: ALCOHOL PREVENTION AND SCREENING DURING PREGNANCY

Alcohol can damage a fetus at any stage of pregnancy. Damage can occur in the earliest weeks of pregnancy, even before a woman knows that she is pregnant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported in a November 2015 article called [Alcohol Use and Binge Drinking Among Women of Childbearing Age](#), that alcohol use during pregnancy is a leading preventable cause of birth defects and developmental disabilities. The CDC estimates that 10.2 percent of pregnant women use alcohol. Studies suggest that as many as 2 to 5 percent of first grade students in the United States may have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). FASDs include fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol-related birth defects, and alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorders which result in neurodevelopmental deficits and lifelong disability.

Beacon Health Options (Beacon) is collaborating with health plans on an initiative to increase the screening of pregnant women for alcohol use during pregnancy. It is the responsibility of every practice to make sure that all pregnant and postpartum women are screened for substance use. Universal screening provides the practitioner with the opportunity to talk to every client about the risks of alcohol, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, tobacco, and other substances and risky behaviors. Structured screening built into the care of every pregnant woman helps eliminate “educated guessing.” The practice of universal screening increases the likelihood of identifying substance use and allows for the earliest possible intervention or referral to specialized treatment. In addition, screening and education of every member encourages prevention and increases awareness of the risks of substance use during pregnancy (Washington Department of Health: Substance Abuse During Pregnancy: Guidelines for Screening and Management January 2015).

Beacon is recommending practitioners use the downloadable T-ACE (T= tolerance, A= annoyed, C= cut down, E= eye opener) Screening Tool developed by R. J. Sokol, MD, to help identify risk drinking. The T-ACE was developed specifically for prenatal use based on the CAGE Substance Abuse Screening Tool. It is four questions that take less than a minute to complete. Beacon is also recommending the ethylglucuronide (EtG) urine test for high risk women. Positive screening may indicate exposure to alcohol up to five days prior testing. To access and other Alcohol and Pregnancy resources please visit <https://www.beaconhealthoptions.com/providers/beacon/network/ncoc-state-government-and-healthplans>

In addition, a brochure from the CDC entitled *Think Before You Drink*, will be enclosed in mailings to pregnant women along with other educational prenatal materials. The brochure provides education regarding the effects of alcohol on the baby and provides information should the woman need assistance to stop drinking.

Please call 866-719-6032 for a copy if you do not have internet access.