Alcohol Use and Binge Drinking Among Women of Childbearing Age

According to results of the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) United States 2011-2013, one in 10 pregnant women in the United States ages 18 to 44 years reports drinking alcohol in the past 30 days of pregnancy. Also, 3.1 percent of pregnant women report binge drinking which is defined as 4 or more alcoholic beverages on one occasion. According to a report in CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) this means that about a third of women who consumes alcohol during pregnancy engage in binge drinking.

Coleen Boyle, Ph.D., Director of CDC’s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities states, “We know that alcohol use during pregnancy can cause birth defects and developmental disabilities in babies, as well as an increased risk of other pregnancy problems, such as miscarriage, stillbirth, and prematurity. “This is an important reminder that women should not drink any alcohol while pregnant. It’s just not worth the risk.”

The CDC reports, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are a group of conditions that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. FASDs are completely preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol during pregnancy. Visit www.cdc.gov/fasd for more information about FASDs.

Results from the study used data from CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a state-based, landline and cell phone survey of the U.S. population. Researchers used the 2011-2013 BRFSS data to estimate the prevalence of alcohol use and binge drinking, for all 50 states and the District of Columbia for women aged 18-44 years. Among pregnant women, alcohol use was highest among:

- Those aged 35-44 years (18.6 %)
- College graduates (13 %)
- Unmarried women (12.9 %)
Alcohol Use and Binge Drinking Among Women of Childbearing Age

For comparison, results showed 1 in 2 (53.6 percent) non-pregnant women in the United States aged 18 to 44 years reports drinking alcohol in the past 30 days and 18.2 percent of non-pregnant women report binge drinking. Among women who reported binge drinking in the past 30 days, pregnant women reported a much higher frequency of binge drinking than non-pregnant women (4.6 and 3.1 episodes respectively). The prevalence of any alcohol use and binge drinking among pregnant and non-pregnant women is slightly higher than estimates reported for 2006-2010 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR).

Cheryl Tan, M.P.H., lead author of the study and an epidemiologist in CDC’s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities states, “Women who are pregnant or might be pregnant should be aware that there is no known safe level of alcohol that can be consumed at any time during pregnancy. All types of alcohol should be avoided, including red or white wine, beer, and liquor.”

For further information regarding this article please contact Wendy Jefferson at the Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 12 Executive Park Drive NE, Atlanta, Georgia, 30329. You can also phone us at 404-712-9829 or visit our website at

http://www.emory.edu/MSACD

The Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development is funded by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities