

# PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

## INDICATOR #3 Alcohol Use during Pregnancy

### DEFINITION

**INDICATOR #3** — Percentage of women who drank alcohol during pregnancy.

### KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Alcohol use in pregnancy is an important health issue that can result in **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**. FASD describes the range of lifelong effects that can occur in an individual who was exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> Effects associated with FASD can include characteristic physical abnormalities, and mental and behavioural deficits.<sup>2-4</sup>
- ▶ There are currently no confirmed statistics on the number of people in Canada who have FASD, yet it is considered to be the leading cause of developmental disability in Canada.<sup>5-7</sup>
- ▶ Research shows that moderate and high-risk drinking among women of childbearing years is a large and growing concern in Canada.<sup>1</sup> In 2009/10, 58 per cent of Canadian women age 18/19–24 and 45 per cent of Canadian women age 25–34 consumed alcohol at levels considered to be moderate or high-risk, and women in these age groups account for approximately 80 per cent of all live births in Canada.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Alcohol use in pregnancy is widely considered to be underreported, especially among women with middle and high levels of education,<sup>c,8</sup> making it a challenge to establish accurate data. However, **binge drinking** among women in their reproductive years can help us to understand the level of alcohol consumption among women in early stages of pregnancy, when many women do not yet know they are pregnant.
- ▶ Figure 3.1 shows that in the last 11 years, binge drinking among women of reproductive age in BC increased substantially.

<sup>c</sup> The standard prenatal clinical checklist asks about alcohol use during pregnancy, but practitioners report that the question often goes unanswered. This may be due to societal stigma about alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and/or due to fears about children being removed from the home.

**FIG 3.1** Percentage of Women of Reproductive Age Who Reported Binge Drinking in the Past Year, BC, 2003 to 2013-14



**Notes:** "Reproductive age" means women who are 15-44 years of age. "Binge drinking in the past year" means consuming five or more drinks on one occasion (except in 2013-14 when it means four or more drinks on one occasion), at least once a month during the 12 months prior to the survey. Due to the change in definition, the data from 2013-14 are not directly comparable to previous years. Data for 2004 and 2006 were unavailable. See Appendix B for more information about this data source.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (public-use microdata file), 2003 to 2013-14. Prepared by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Team, BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2016.

## REFERENCES

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