



POLLING SNAPSHOT

Alcohol use, pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

SEPTEMBER 2021

fare

Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education

KEY FINDINGS

Almost one third (30 per cent) of Australians are unaware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Australians aren't aware that women who are pregnant should not drink any alcohol, according to government health guidelines.

Men have lower awareness of the risk of FASD and that alcohol should not be consumed when pregnant, compared to women.

People aged 18-34 years old had the lowest awareness of the risk of FASD (37% unaware) and that alcohol should be not be consumed when pregnant (32% unaware), compared to older age groups.

ABOUT THE POLLING

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) commissioned YouGov Galaxy to conduct polling of Australians to understand their awareness of the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The polling was conducted online between 20 January 2020 and 1 February 2020. The sample comprised 2,264 people aged 18 years and over, residing in Australia. After data collection, results were weighted by age, gender and location according to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates. In reporting analysis by gender, only male and female respondents have been included, due to low sample size for respondents answering 'other'.

State and territory sample sizes achieved were:

- Australian Capital Territory – 202
- New South Wales – 358
- Northern Territory – 201
- Queensland – 309
- South Australia – 324
- Tasmania – 200
- Victoria – 354
- Western Australia – 316

FINDINGS

Australians were asked about their awareness of alcohol use during pregnancy being associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a lifelong disability. Almost one third (30 per cent) of Australians are unaware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause FASD.

Table 1 presents levels of awareness by Australian states and territories. Statistical significance testing found that awareness was significantly higher in Western Australia (77 per cent) and Queensland (74 per cent) than other states and territories, while significantly lower in Victoria (67 per cent) and New South Wales (68 per cent).

TABLE 1: AWARENESS THAT ALCOHOL USE DURING PREGNANCY IS ASSOCIATED WITH FASD

	NSW	ACT	VIC	TAS	QLD	SA	WA	NT	Australia
Level of awareness	68% ↓	75%	67% ↓	79%	74% ↑	71%	77% ↑	81%	70%

* Arrows denote a statistically significant result, with an upward arrow indicating significantly higher than all other groups, and downward significantly lower.

Demographic analysis of FASD awareness also revealed:

- Men had lower awareness (63 per cent) than women (77 per cent)
- People aged 18-34 had the lowest awareness (63 per cent), when compared to those aged 35-49 (68 per cent) and those aged 50 and over (77 per cent)
- Awareness was lower in metropolitan areas (69 per cent) compared to regional areas (75 per cent).

Australians were asked about their awareness of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines for reducing health risks from drinking alcohol. Guideline 3 states that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not drink any alcohol.

The poll tested awareness by asking respondents, *'what is the safest number of standard drinks a pregnant woman can consume on any one occasion to avoid harm to the fetus?'*

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Australians did not correctly answer 'zero standard drinks', indicating they are not aware that pregnant women should not drink any alcohol. This includes people either incorrectly answering that a woman can drink one or more standard drink on an occasion (17 per cent) or answering 'don't know' (per cent).

As Table 2 shows, Victorian respondents reported significantly lower awareness of the guideline at 74 per cent than other States and Territories, while South Australian and Western Australian respondents reported significantly higher awareness of 84 per cent.

TABLE 2: AWARENESS OF NHMRC ALCOHOL GUIDELINE THREE

	NSW	ACT	VIC	TAS	QLD	SA	WA	NT	Australia
Correct (zero standard drinks)	76%	82%	74% ↓	81%	75%	84% ↑	84% ↑	79%	77%
Incorrect (one or more standard drinks on an occasion)	19%	12%	19%	13%	19%	10% ↓	10% ↓	12%	17%
Don't Know	5%	5%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%	9%	6%

* Arrows denote a statistically significant result, with an upward arrow indicating significantly higher than all other groups, and downward significantly lower.

Demographic analysis of guideline awareness also revealed the following:

- Men had lower awareness (71 per cent) than women (83 per cent)
- Those aged 18-34 had the lowest awareness (68 per cent), when compared to those aged 35-49 (72 per cent) and 50 years and over (86 per cent)
- While awareness levels were similar between regional and metropolitan areas, people in metropolitan areas were more likely to answer incorrectly (18 per cent) than those in regional areas (11 per cent), while those in regional areas were more likely to answer 'don't know' (9 per cent) than those in metropolitan areas (5 per cent).