



## **News for Immediate Release**

**Sept. 9, 2013**

### **Women Reminded of Health Risks with Drinking Alcohol During Pregnancy**

An Estimated 40,000 Newborns Are Affected Each Year by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

**Butler** – Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Deputy Secretary Cheryl Dondero started off Pennsylvania’s annual Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder awareness event today at Butler Memorial Hospital, reminding Pennsylvanians of the dangers associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

The event, which was open today to both health professionals and the general public, occurs each September in observance of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Month.

“FASD is 100 percent preventable, yet an estimated 40,000 babies are born with FASD each year,” Dondero said. “This troubling and alarming number demonstrates the importance and need for continued education about the dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.”

FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in children exposed to alcohol during fetal development. Alcohol use during pregnancy can be devastating on the life of an unborn child, causing possible physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.

Various studies have shown there is no safe level of drinking during pregnancy. Alcohol has more harmful, long-term effects to an unborn child than heroin or cocaine. Most individuals do not realize that even one binge-drinking episode can result in permanent damage to the fetus.

The event’s keynote speakers shared their personal FASD testimonies. Dianne O’Connor, a certified FASD trainer for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shared her experience raising children with FASD. Jasmine Suarez-O’Connor, a founding and current staff member for the Arc Self Advocates with FASD in Action, shared her experience living with FASD.

This event was conducted in partnership with the Western Pennsylvania FASD Planning Committee, which includes the following agencies:

- Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.
- Allegheny County DHS Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services
- Beaver County Behavioral Health Drug and Alcohol Program
- Butler County Drug and Alcohol Programs
- Crawford County Drug and Alcohol Executive Commission, Inc.
- Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission Inc.

- Greene County Human Services Program
- Lawrence County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.
- Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission, Inc.
- Venango County Substance Abuse Program
- Washington Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.
- Westmoreland Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.

A variety of human service, behavioral health, early education, drug and alcohol treatment organizations and health providers were on-site to provide educational and service information to those in attendance.

Governor Tom Corbett recently signed a proclamation, declaring September as FASD Awareness Month in Pennsylvania. FASD Awareness Day is observed nationally and around the world today, Sept. 9.

For more information about FASD, visit <http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov>.

For more information about DDAP, visit <http://www.ddap.pa.gov>.

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**Editor's Note:** The text of Governor Corbett's proclamation follows:

*FETAL ALCOHOL DISORDER (FASD) AWARENESS MONTH  
September 2013*

WHEREAS, healthy children are among the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's most important resources, and FASD is the leading preventable cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities; and

WHEREAS, FASD is a set of mental, physical and neurobehavioral birth defects, that are the direct result of alcohol use during pregnancy, and that as many as one in every one hundred births may be impacted by prenatal exposure to alcohol; and

WHEREAS, the annual cost of FASD to the U.S. healthcare system is estimated at more than \$6 billion; and

WHEREAS, more than 50 percent of women of childbearing age drink alcohol and 7.6 percent (or 1 in 13) pregnant women drink alcohol; and

WHEREAS, the rate of heavy drinking during pregnancy has not decreased since rising sharply in the early 1990s; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to raise awareness among its residents, especially women of childbearing age, regarding FASD education, prevention and intervention, and to improve awareness; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has established a FASD Task Force and a FASD State Plan to prevent new occurrences of FASD through a comprehensive approach to educating citizens and systems within the Commonwealth, and enhancing a system of care for individuals and their families who are affected by FASD; and

WHEREAS, International FASD Day was first observed on September 9, 1999, so that the ninth day of the ninth month would always be a reminder that during the nine months of pregnancy a woman should abstain from alcohol.

THEREFORE, I, Tom Corbett, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, do hereby proclaim the month of September, as FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER AWARENESS MONTH in Pennsylvania. I encourage all Pennsylvanians, both adults and children, to support those individuals and families affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

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