



**Media Release  
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**Dangers of drug and alcohol use during pregnancy: medics ask for more training**

A new study has found that doctors and nurses believe they need more training and resources to help them talk to pregnant women about the dangers of alcohol and drug use.

Dr Trecia Wouldes of the University of Auckland, who conducted the study for Alcohol Healthwatch, says while most doctors and nurses surveyed said they believed women should abstain from alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy, many also indicated there were gaps in their knowledge.

For example, she says of the 241 health professionals surveyed, only 25 percent were able to correctly identify the four main criteria for a diagnosis of fetal alcohol syndrome. This is despite these criteria remaining unchanged for 35 years.

“Most of those surveyed indicated they would welcome further training on advising women about the dangers of alcohol and drug use during pregnancy. Many also said they would find it useful to have a standard set of questions about alcohol and drug use that they could go through with patients.”

She said some health professionals indicated they may be less likely to question pregnant women about alcohol and drug use, and give advice, in particular circumstances.

“For example, they may not discuss alcohol and other drug use with women from a culture or economic background they perceived to be at low risk.”

“More education from training institutions for current and future medical practitioners would help them feel more confident in dealing with alcohol and drug use issues.”

“We know many women continue to drink alcohol and use other drugs during pregnancy and disorders from such exposure are at unacceptable levels across

society. Health professionals are uniquely placed to prevent another generation from unnecessary risk and it is important that their education be increased dramatically."

Rebecca Williams, Director of Alcohol Healthwatch, agrees, saying this is a sensitive issue, made worse by a critical knowledge gap.

"Previous studies have focused on what women do during pregnancy but little was known about the sort of advice they were receiving from their doctor or midwife. The findings from this study show we have a great opportunity to work with health professionals."

### **For more information**

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The Report is available to download from [www.ahw.org.nz](http://www.ahw.org.nz)