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News Release

Local Experts Call Report on Drinking During Pregnancy “Flawed and Dangerous”

(Salt Lake City, UT) - A study by University College London (UCL) suggests that light drinking of alcoholic beverages during pregnancy doesn't appear to harm fetuses. That finding has stirred up a firestorm of dissenting opinions in Utah and across the country.

“That conclusion is in direct opposition to reams of research by several reputable organizations and is a danger to mothers and babies everywhere,” said Utah Pregnancy Risk Line (PRL) Program Manager Julia Robertson. The PRL is a free phone service that educates women and doctors about the effects of exposure to drugs, alcohol and other toxins during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

In the UCL study, researchers looked at the cognitive and behavioral performance of children born to women who recalled being "light drinkers" in pregnancy compared to children of women who usually drink, but who stated they did not consume alcohol during pregnancy. The authors say they found no differences between the two groups of children.

“This study is simply inaccurate,” said Dr. Kenneth Lyons Jones, one of the doctors who first identified Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in 1973. “The women who participated in this study were asked long after their babies were born to remember accurately about the specific amounts of alcohol they had to drink,” he pointed out. “Under any circumstance it's difficult to get good information on how much and exactly when a woman drank, but this particular study was even more susceptible to error due to the length of time that had passed before the mothers were asked the questions,” he added.

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“Furthermore, it’s common for women to report that they did not drink in pregnancy” said Robertson. “It’s probably the case that when women are asked about alcohol consumption during pregnancy they usually report not drinking *after* they find out they are pregnant, which is usually four to six weeks into pregnancy,” she said. “Some of the women who said they were ‘non-drinkers’ may have been drinkers. This could be one reason why there was no difference between the two groups of children involved in the study.”

There is overwhelming evidence from more than 30 years of research that directly links drinking during pregnancy to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other disorders and supports the conclusion that alcohol can be harmful to a developing baby throughout the entire pregnancy. A “safe” amount of alcohol that any individual woman can drink while pregnant is unknown, reports U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina M. Benjamin.

Women who are pregnant or planning to conceive should talk to their doctors about drinking alcohol during pregnancy. For more information about the effects of alcohol on a fetus, call the Pregnancy Risk line at 1-800-822-2229.

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