

# Pregnant women ignore alcohol warnings

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADISON, Wis. — The number of women who admit drinking alcoholic beverages while pregnant has increased despite health warnings concerning fetuses, researchers say.

"Fetal alcohol syndrome is the most common recognizable cause of mental retardation in the United States. It's a cause that is totally preventable," said Kenneth Lyons Jones of the University of California-San Diego. Jones was among about 100 scientists at a University of Wisconsin conference last week on chemically induced birth defects. Using a slide show, Jones said news media often publicize the harm to fetuses of marijuana, cocaine and heroin, but "you can tie them all in a bundle and they

don't have anywhere near the effect that alcohol does."

A pregnant woman who drinks can contribute to a baby's low weight, small head, facial abnormalities, low intelligence, hyperactivity and joint problems, scientists said. Despite the evidence, the number of expectant mothers who admit drinking alcohol increased from 12.4 percent in 1991 to 16.3 percent in 1995, they said.

"Unfortunately we're not doing a very good job of educating pregnant women about the deleterious effects of alcohol," Jones said.

Scientists suspect alcohol affects the fetus' brain as it forms facial structures and controls movement in the womb.

"There is no safe amount for all women to drink during pregnancy," Jones said.



File photo  
A pregnant woman who drinks can contribute to a baby's low weight, small head, facial abnormalities, low intelligence, hyperactivity and joint problems, scientists say.

# CDC finds kids in dorms at higher risk for disease

By BILL BERGSTROM  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — College freshmen, especially those who live in dormitories, face a higher risk of potentially fatal meningococcal meningitis than others in their age group, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates.

As CDC and college health officials conduct further research to look for the reasons, they recommend that students consider getting vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

A \$60 vaccine would prevent about three-fourths of the cases that occur among college students. Dr. MarJeanne Collins, director of health services at the University of Pennsylvania, said last week at the annual meeting of the American College Health Association.

Asked if students would consider that too costly, Collins, a member of the ACHA's Vaccine-Preventable Disease Task Force, said, "How many beers can you drink for \$60? Twenty beers?"

"The cost of a college education at my institution is \$30,000 a year. It is all relative. I would think it's within the ballpark of other vaccines," she said.

Though the disease is rare, Collins said it is devastating to the

students, families and campuses affected.

"Anyone that's had ... to talk to a parent who has just yesterday had an active, healthy college student, who today is informed that that student is dead, really feels the tragedy of this illness," she said.

Dr. Michael Bruce, an epidemiologist at the CDC, reported that a study of 83 reported meningitis cases involving college students from September through May indicated a rate among freshmen of 1.4 cases per 100,000, rising sharply to 3.8 cases per 100,000 among freshmen living in dormitories.

That compares with a rate of 1 case per 100,000 for 18-22 year olds nationally, and a slightly lower rate of 0.7 cases per 100,000 for college undergraduates overall.

The findings reinforced an analysis by Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health researchers, published last week in The Journal of the American Medical Association, that said college students who live on campus face greater risk of meningitis infections than other students.

That study prompted the ACHA to renew a 1997 recommendation that all college students consider getting vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

"Both of these studies support

the recommendation that colleges educate and inform students about the disease and provide access to the vaccine," Collins said.

The most common meningococcal disease is meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Early symptoms include fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting, lethargy, stiff neck and rash.

"Antibiotics can be effective, but treatment must begin immediately. About one in 10 people who get the illness die, or about 300 people a year nationally. About 10 percent

of those who survive are left with brain damage, kidney failure, hearing loss or loss of limbs.

Of about 3,000 cases a year nationally, 125 to 175 afflict college students and 15 to 20 students die each year, according to public health estimates.

The researchers said results are expected this fall from a more detailed study of students' lifestyles that will examine whether factors such as living situations, participation on sports teams, alcohol consumption or tobacco use affect meningococcal disease risk.

## Malnutrition

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those people is Delores Rosenblatt-Groover, 65, whose severe arthritis keeps her in bed most of the time as she struggles to survive on \$277 a month.

"I can't afford to buy vegetables, fruits, desserts," she said. "Sometimes I can't get out of bed to prepare a meal."

Wiping back tears, Ms. Rosenblatt-Groover, who is separated from her husband, explains that on the rare occasions someone takes her to the grocery she buys as much canned tuna and dry cereal as she can afford.

"It's depressing, sometimes," she said.

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