



# Perinatal e-News

LA BEST BABIES NETWORK



Healthy Babies. Our Future.  
Presented by First 5 LA



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[www.LABestBabies.org](http://www.LABestBabies.org)

## Issue #37

- Network's Policy Statement on Maternal Depression
- Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancies
- Medications and Pregnancy

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January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

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We invite you to contribute story ideas and event listings for our consideration in *Perinatal e-News*. To submit items please e-mail [contact@labestbabies.org](mailto:contact@labestbabies.org).

### Network's New Policy Statement: 'Access to Quality Care for Maternal Depression: Meeting the Challenge'

LA Best Babies Network and the L.A. County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force are working together to improve access to maternal depression screening and care. As part of this effort, the Network released the policy statement "Access to Quality Care for Maternal Depression: Meeting the Challenge." The goal of the policy statement is to raise awareness with key stakeholders and galvanize support for improving quality of services and access to care for women with maternal depression.

The policy statement offers several recommendations to improve access to mental health services and quality of care for women with perinatal depression. The statement also highlights previous legislative activity on the issue of maternal depression. Three of the key recommendations are:

- increase access to screening women for perinatal depression
- increase trainings for providers in the area of screening and treating perinatal depression.
- improve reimbursement mechanisms for postpartum depression care.

Women should be screened for depression during the preconception period, pregnancy and the postpartum period. In L.A. County, screening for maternal depression is not performed as frequently or consistently as recommended. Some barriers to maternal depression screening are a lack

of knowledge about standard of quality care, limited reimbursement for depression screening and a lack of resources for referrals to providers who treat patients for perinatal depression.

This policy statement is the first in a series of briefs and reports on the issue of perinatal mental health with the goal of increasing awareness and legislative support of expanding both women's access to care and the training of medical professionals who deal with maternal depression.

Learn more:

View ["Access to Quality Care for Maternal Depression: Meeting the Challenge"](#)

Read ["Improving Maternal Mental Health" in \*Perinatal Connections\*](#)

## Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancies

Prenatal exposure to alcohol causes a range of problems called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is comprised of a range of disorders such as abnormal facial features, growth deficiencies and central nervous system problems, as well as learning disabilities and problems with vision, hearing and behavior. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the most severe consequence of prenatal drinking and one of the leading preventable causes of mental retardation and birth defects.

Drinking any amount of alcohol during pregnancy can increase the risk of a baby being born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. Although fetal death is the most extreme outcome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a permanent, lifelong physically and mentally disabling condition. According to the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is 100% preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.

In the U.S., the rate of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome per 10,000 total births is:

- Asians 0.3
- Hispanics 0.8

- Whites 0.9
- African Americans 6.0
- Native Americans 29.9

In 2005, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an [Advisory on Alcohol Use in Pregnancy](#) advising women not to drink alcohol if they are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or at risk of becoming pregnant.

LA Best Babies Network works toward preventing alcohol-exposed pregnancies through its Best Babies Collaboratives and Healthy Births Care Quality Collaborative.

Learn more:

Get information on [Alcohol and Reproductive Health](#)

Read more on [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders](#)

## Birth Defects and Exposure to Medications and Other Substances

Teratogens are substances that interfere with the normal development of the fetus and cause birth defects. Birth defects are a leading cause of death in a baby's first year of life. Teratogens include prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines, as well as alcohol, illegal substances, herbal products and vaccines. The Teratology Information Specialists have compiled [fact sheets](#) to educate the public on some of the medications and drugs of concern. The information is available in English and Spanish under the [Organization of Teratology Information Services \(OTIS\) Research Study Participation](#).

There are no clear rules about whether it is safe to take medications during pregnancy. Women who are planning a pregnancy must discuss the potential effect of any medications, dietary supplements and herbal remedies they are taking with their doctor.

### How LA Best Babies Network is Making a Difference

- The Network's "[Healthy Families](#)" [Web pages](#) offers advice and resources on taking medications to women who may be planning a pregnancy.
- The Network's **Healthy Births Care Quality Collaborative** is working to optimize care for pregnant women to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes. Through the collaborative, providers enhance their skills and knowledge of screening, treatment and preventive practices for a number of health,

behavioral, and social risk factors including tobacco, alcohol and substance use that, if not addressed, can adversely impact the health of both mother and infant.

- The Network's **Best Babies Collaboratives** provide specialized training workshops in substance abuse to its Case Managers and Supervisors.

Learn more:

Visit [The National Institutes of Health](#) and National [Women's Health Information Center](#) for more information on medicine and birth defects.

Learn more about [Newborn Screening](#)

For more information birth defects visit  
<http://www.cdc.gov>  
<http://www.marchofdimes.com>

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