

# **Ventura County Public Health News Release**

**Ventura County Public Health, A division of the Ventura Health Care Agency**  
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## **For Immediate Release**

### **Ventura County Public Health's Perinatal Substance Use Program identifies, prevents substance abuse during pregnancy**

**On September 9, International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Day, health officials emphasize that “No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.”**

**(VENTURA COUNTY) – Calif.** - During the second week of September, motorists and pedestrians passing the Ventura County Government Center will notice an educational display at the corner of Telephone and Victoria Ave. On Sept. 9, **National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Day**, representatives from Ventura County Public Health (VCPH) will place 2,000 small white flags along the well-traveled corridor as a visual reminder of the serious health consequences that can result when an expectant mother exposes her unborn child to alcohol, tobacco or other illegal substances during pregnancy. Over 2,000 children are born every year in Ventura County after exposure to alcohol, tobacco, or other illegal substances during pregnancy.

Since 2003, VCPH has partnered with Ventura County prenatal care providers to use the 4Ps Plus Screening Tool – a nationally recognized program that helps identify women at risk for using alcohol, tobacco and other illegal substances during pregnancy. Over the past nine years, more than 20,000 pregnant women have been screened and in 2011, 19.3% of those screened admitted to using alcohol, tobacco or an illegal drug during the month before they knew they were pregnant.

“Public Health is passionate about the 4 P’s Plus Program because it is a highly effective way to identify, prevent and treat substance abuse during pregnancy,” said Dr. Paul Russell, Deputy Health Officer, Medical Director for Children’s Medical Services and Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health, and chair of the Perinatal Substance Use Task Force. “We hope that by raising awareness of this often undiagnosed and completely preventable problem, we will help ensure that all babies in Ventura County are born healthy and substance-free.”

According to the Center for Disease Control, exposure to alcohol during pregnancy is the leading cause of preventable birth defects today. As many as 1 in 100 Americans may be living with the effects of maternal drinking in pregnancy, known collectively as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). Alcohol use during pregnancy crosses all socioeconomic boundaries and it is estimated that the lifetime cost to the taxpayers for individuals with FASDs is almost \$2 million per person.

"Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are 100% preventable by abstaining from alcohol and drugs during conception and pregnancy," says Russell. "Unfortunately, many women are still not aware of the dangers associated with consuming alcohol, tobacco and drugs during pregnancy and many prenatal care providers do not regularly screen for this sort of behavior."

VCPH has created a video entitled ***Being Pregnant in Ventura County*** that highlights the FASD problem and emphasizes that "no amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy." The video, which will be introduced to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, Sept. 11 and can be viewed at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td\\_Tn5zu-DA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td_Tn5zu-DA)

For more information about Ventura County Public Health's Perinatal Substance Use Program or to obtain prenatal substance abuse services, contact Seleta Dobrosky, public health nurse program coordinator at: (805) 981-5190 or go to: <http://bit.ly/NBzzt9>

#### **About the Ventura County Public Health Department**

The Ventura County Public Health Department's (VCPH) mission is to empower the community to improve health; promote health and emergency preparedness; and prevent disease, injury, and disability.

VCPH is committed to protecting and promoting the health of all Ventura County residents, especially in those communities that have greater health disparities and reduced access to care.

Under the direction of Ventura County Public Health Director, Barry Fisher, VCPH employs more than 300 nurses, doctors, health educators, lab technicians, medical therapists, and epidemiologists and administers a wide array of programs and services including preventative health, community nursing, emergency medical services, health education, infectious disease, epidemiology/surveillance and animal control.

For more information, call: (800) 781-4449 or go to: [www.vchca.org/ph](http://www.vchca.org/ph)

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