

Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

Early Intervention Quick Reference

Impact of Perinatal Substances Use on Infants

Common Substance of Abuse:

- Tobacco use, marijuana use and passive smoking can result in a higher risk for stillbirth.
- Use of alcohol, barbiturates, caffeine and anti-anxiety medications may cause a newborn to be born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).
- Opioid misuse carries a high risk of NAS.

Withdrawal signs may begin 24 hours to seven days after birth.

Symptoms of NAS include tremors, irritability, increased wakefulness, high-pitched crying, seizures, frequent yawning and sneezing, difficulty feeding, vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, increased sweating, and fevers or temperature fluctuations.

Treatment of NAS babies focuses on minimizing environmental stimuli: dark, quiet, holding and comforting, frequent feedings. Medications are used only if this intervention fails.

Mothers with a substance use disorder need a lot of support to learn to care for and bond with their baby.

Alcohol use in pregnancy can result in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, which has no cure. FASD symptoms can include: small head, small and wideset eyes, thin upper lip, below average height and weight, heart problems, kidney defects, deformed limbs or fingers, sight or hearing problems.

Early intervention in any of these situations makes a big difference.

How to Support Parents

Teach them soothing techniques

- Swaddle the baby
- Keep lights low and TV off
- Touch baby gently, speak softly
- Snuggle baby undressed against your chest
- Recognize when baby is distressed and calm baby down

Refer parents to early intervention programs