



**COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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Released By: Florence Neglia, Director
Health Promotion and
Professional Development
(951) 358-7131

Contact: Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health
Phone (951) 358-5192
Fax (951) 358-5386

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Riverside County Combats Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

PROMOTING SUBSTANCE-FREE PREGNANCIES: 3,841 babies in Riverside County were born exposed to drugs and/or alcohol in 2004.

Riverside, CA, June 26, 2006: Motivated by the Surgeon General's statement that no amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy, 52 doctors in Riverside County have responded in the last year by screening patients with the Screening, Assessment, Referral, and Treatment (SART) approach. This simple one-page assessment questions expectant mothers about their use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs as a routine step of their initial prenatal visits. While conversing with mothers about substance use, health workers are able to provide a brief intervention to educate mothers about the effects that alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs have on their unborn baby. Babies whose mothers drink, smoke and use illicit drugs during pregnancy are at a higher risk of miscarriage, birth defects, low birth weight, and mental retardation. In 2003, the National Center of Health Statistics reported that 1 in 15 babies were born with a low birth weight in California and 1 in 10 babies were born preterm.

The perinatal SART Program was designed by Dr. Ira Chasnoff, President of the Children's Research Triangle and Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago. Chasnoff is one of the nation's leading researchers in the field of maternal drug use during pregnancy and the effects on the newborn infant and child.

Statistics from 244 SART screenings of women that have used alcohol since known pregnant have shown that 32.4% are heavy users that consume daily. As a result of this program, the County of Riverside Department of Public Health, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Branch plans to see an increased awareness among expecting mothers of the risks that alcohol and drugs pose on their unborn fetus. It is critical for expectant mothers to see their OB/GYN to get the essential prenatal care for a healthy pregnancy.

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