

#DRYMESTER – Greater Manchester Campaign to Reduce Alcohol Exposed Pregnancies

What is it?

The Greater Manchester Alcohol Harms programme explored how a public-facing campaign could help reduce Alcohol Exposed Pregnancies and prevent new cases of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) across the city-region.

The programme identified a gap in clear, accurate, and non-judgmental information available to the public and parents-to-be.

#DRYMESTER was delivered in two phases via social media platforms. Phase 1 (May–July 2019) focused on raising awareness in four pilot areas and was independently evaluated by Bluegrass Research, which reported 4.5 million views and strong engagement, particularly among mums-to-be and their partners.

The campaign centred on the Chief Medical Officer's guidance that there is "no safe amount, and no safe time" to drink alcohol during pregnancy, empowering and supporting parents-to-be to choose an alcohol-free pregnancy.

What was the timeline?

The initial #DRYMESTER campaign ran from May to July 2019, but its momentum has continued well beyond that period. The campaign remains active and has since been adopted by regions across the UK and internationally.

How did it happen?

The campaign was evidence-based, developed in response to a clear need identified through Greater Manchester's own research, which modelled FASD prevalence for the first time in the UK. This study, led by the University of Salford and partners, found that up to 3.6% of children in three mainstream schools showed signs of FASD, with none previously diagnosed—highlighting significant under-recognition.

Informed by this research, the campaign's creative concept was developed in collaboration with midwives, families with lived experience of FASD, the National FASD, Greater Manchester FASD network and pregnant women to ensure messages were accurate, supportive, and resonated with the target audience.

As part of the campaign development process, the aim was to raise awareness of three key areas: the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, the Chief Medical Officer's

(CMO) guidance that there is no safe amount or safe time to drink while pregnant, and the impacts of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The solution was a clear and consistent message: “No safe time, no safe amount.” This message was delivered through a social media-led campaign, #DRYMESTER, supported by practical resources for midwives, GPs, and community partners.

The campaign targeted a broad audience — primarily women aged 18–35 who could become pregnant, as well as their partners, families, and friends (women and men aged 18–50). Content was shared across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and Google Display and Search Networks to maximise reach and engagement.

How did you involve the community?

To ensure the campaign reflected the needs of parents, families, and carers affected by FASD, people with lived experience (PWLE) played a key role in its development. Their insights and experiences were central to shaping the campaign’s messaging and approach. Parents involved reported feeling that their contributions were valued and that their knowledge had directly informed the work. Many also felt the campaign helped raise much-needed awareness of FASD within their communities.

What were the challenges and how were they overcome?

Alcohol during pregnancy is a sensitive issue, often surrounded by stigma, blame, and misunderstanding. In developing the campaign, it was crucial to strike a careful balance—acknowledging the real and lasting impact FASD can have on individuals and families, while avoiding judgement or fear-based messaging, ensuring support and clear advice for mums-to-be and those planning pregnancy. Families affected by FASD helped shape the tone, ensuring it reflected both the challenges and the strengths of those living with the condition. It was important to convey that while FASD can bring lifelong difficulties, it does not define a person’s potential—and with the right support, individuals with FASD can lead full and meaningful lives.

What has been the impact?

The first phase of the campaign ran over 10 weeks from May to July 2019 in Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, and Tameside & Glossop. To measure its impact, an independent research agency conducted face-to-face interviews with 1,304 people across the targeted areas — 639 before and 640 after the campaign — to assess shifts in awareness and attitudes.

Key findings included:

- A 3% increase in people stating that no amount of alcohol is acceptable during pregnancy (equivalent to 19 individuals changing their views).
- Eight participants reported taking direct preventative action, such as stopping drinking during pregnancy or cutting down while trying to conceive.
- Four in five pregnant women reported reducing their alcohol consumption after the campaign, compared to just one in ten in the general population.
- Those exposed to the campaign were significantly more open to advice from friends and family regarding alcohol in pregnancy.
- Awareness of the health risks, particularly FASD, increased notably, with 80% of those who saw the campaign associating alcohol use in pregnancy with the condition.

Independent evaluation confirmed the campaign successfully achieved its three core objectives: increasing awareness of the Chief Medical Officer's guidance, improving understanding of FASD, and encouraging parents-to-be to go alcohol-free during pregnancy.

The campaign, which included social media advertising, influencer marketing through radio, Google and YouTube advertising to drive traffic to a campaign specific website, won Best Digital Campaign at the MPA marketing Awards, 2021 and received a special commendation in the Marketing Society Brave Awards 2020, in the Not-for-Profit Marketing category.

On January 29th, 2020, the National Institute of Health Research, in collaboration with the Medical Research Council and researchers from Bristol University, published the most comprehensive review to date on the effects of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, citing #DRYMESTER as the safest approach.

A Public Health England Report – [Maternity high impact area 4: Reducing the incidence of harms caused by alcohol in pregnancy](#), published in January 2021, features #DRYMESTER as its main good-practice case study.

The programme has also been recommended as an example of good practice in the [Department of Health and Social Care's Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Health Needs Assessment](#).

The campaign has been supported by MP Bill Esterson, who has highlighted the importance of supporting #DRYMESTER and it being an area of good practice. It has also been referenced twice by Jo Churchill, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health 2019-21, when questioned on the Government approach to AEP and FASD.

NHS Greater Manchester AEP programme lead participated in the development of the NICE Quality Standard, published in March 2022, designed to improve the diagnosis and assessment of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

The campaign has also been successfully commissioned by numerous stakeholders beyond Greater Manchester, including regions such as Cheshire & Merseyside, Chesterfield, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB, Essex, Hertfordshire, Sheffield, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, and Suffolk.

The #DRYMESTER campaign has provided global stakeholders with effective tools to raise awareness of the Chief Medical Officer's guidance and support parents-to-be in choosing an alcohol-free pregnancy. Engagement on social media and the campaign website often comes from FASD and alcohol awareness groups in countries like the United States, Canada, Spain, Estonia, and Australia.

Further information

NHS Greater Manchester - [Drymester](#)