

- Drinking of alcoholic beverages / Pregnancy / Child development

## Don't let childbearing-age women drink, urges WHO

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WOMEN of childbearing age should be banned from drinking alcohol, says the World Health Organisation.

It's latest Global Alcohol Action Plan calls on countries to raise awareness of alcohol-related harm and its harmful use.

A first draft of the plan says 'appropriate attention' should be given to the prevention of drinking in children, pregnant women and women of childbearing age.

Last night the drinks industry described the proposal and paternalistic and sexist.

The draft guidance warns that booze is associated increased disease, poor mental health, violence, lost productivity and strained relationships.

And it adds: 'One of the most dramatic manifestations of harm to persons other than drinkers is pre-natal alcohol exposure and the development of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders.' Symptoms in children exposed to alcohol in the womb can include poor growth, distinct facial features and learning and behavioural problems. The plan suggests such harms could be publicised through an international 'world no alcohol day/week'.

It says: 'Appropriate attention should be given to prevention of the initiation of drinking among children and adolescents, prevention of drinking among pregnant women and women of childbearing age, and protection of people from pressures to drink. The UK's Chief Medical Officers say the 'safest approach' for women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant is not to drink alcohol at all.

However, Matt Lambert, of UK alcohol trade body the Portman Group, said it was 'extremely concerned, by the WHO's proposal. He added: 'As well as being sexist and paternalistic, and potentially restricting the freedoms of most women, it goes well beyond their remit and is not rooted in science.'