

Attitudes to and awareness of alcohol pregnancy warning labels

Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey 2015/16

June 2017

ISBN: 978-0-478-4490-8

Citation: Health Promotion Agency. (2017). *Attitudes to and awareness of alcohol pregnancy warning labels: Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey 2015/16*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency

Prepared for the Health Promotion Agency by:
Dr Rhiannon Newcombe, Hayley Guiney, Dr Holly Trowland and Dr Fiona Imlach

Any queries regarding this report should be directed to the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) at the following address:

HEALTH PROMOTION AGENCY
PO Box 2142
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
www.hpa.org.nz

June 2017

Copyright

The copyright owner of this publication is HPA. HPA permits the reproduction of material from this publication without prior notification, provided that fair representation is made of the material and HPA is acknowledged as the source.

CONTENTS

Executive summary	4
Background	5
Method	7
Results	9
Attitudes to alcohol pregnancy warning messages	10
Awareness of pregnancy warning messages in women	12
Understanding of warning messages	15
References	16
Appendix: Summary of non-significant effects	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) is a national survey of people aged 15 years and over about alcohol consumption patterns, alcohol-related behaviour, consequences of consuming alcohol, and attitudes. This report describes results from the 2015/16 ABAS survey, representing 4,000 respondents.

This report presents descriptive results about *attitudes* to labels on alcohol products that warn against drinking in pregnancy (pregnancy warning labels) for all respondents. Results for *awareness* of pregnancy warning labels are presented for women aged 18 to 44 years. Four questions from ABAS were analysed for this report.

KEY FINDINGS

Attitudes to pregnancy warning labels among adults aged 15 years and over

- The majority of respondents (78%) said 'yes' when asked whether messages or symbols about not drinking alcohol during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products.
- Support for such labels was higher among:
 - females
 - young and older adults (15 to 24-year-olds and those aged 45+ years, compared with 25 to 34-year-olds)
 - Pacific and Asian respondents (compared with those identifying as European/Other)
 - those with a relatively low household income (<\$50,000 compared with >\$100,000 in the previous 12 months).

Awareness of pregnancy warning labels among women aged 18 to 44 years

- Around a quarter (24%) of women aged 18 to 44 years reported seeing messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant in the past year.
- Fewer older women (35 to 44-year-olds compared with 18 to 24-year-olds) and Pacific or Asian women (compared with European/Other) had seen such messages or symbols.
- The warning label most commonly seen by women aged 18 to 44 years was a 'picture of a pregnant lady drinking with a cross/line through' (34% of those who had seen a warning label in the past year).
- Women most commonly interpreted the message from the labels they saw to be 'do not drink while pregnant' (74% of those who had seen a warning label in the past year).

BACKGROUND

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) has a particular focus on providing a comprehensive approach to reduce drinking alcohol during pregnancy. This is because a mother's drinking in pregnancy can harm her developing baby, causing fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). People with FASD have a range of lifelong physical and mental disabilities, which can include intellectual disability, learning difficulties and birth defects (Williams, Smith, & Committee on Substance Abuse, 2015). HPA promotes the message 'Stop drinking alcohol if you could be pregnant, are pregnant or are trying to get pregnant. There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy'.¹ This message has been endorsed by the Ministry of Health and many other New Zealand health-related organisations.

Currently, an action plan led by the Ministry of Health is underway to prevent FASD and support those with FASD and their families to live the best possible lives (FASD Working Group, 2016). A priority action in this plan is providing clear, unambiguous messages to increase awareness of the risks of drinking in pregnancy. Warning labels on alcohol products have been highlighted as a channel through which women, and the community in general, can receive these messages.

In New Zealand and Australia, a trial of voluntary labelling on alcohol products to warn of the risks of drinking in pregnancy ('pregnancy warning labels') has been underway since 2012.² This voluntary trial was evaluated in 2014 and 2016. The Australian and New Zealand Ministerial Forum is due to consider voluntary versus mandatory regulation of alcohol pregnancy warning labelling in late 2017. Evaluation results from 2014 found that around half of alcohol products reportedly had a pregnancy warning label in NZ and this was anticipated to increase to 90-100% by 2016 (Ministry for Primary Industries, 2014). Evaluation results from 2016 are yet to be published (as of June 2017).

The most common pregnancy warning label used in New Zealand is the 'pictogram' (see Figure 1) or the written message 'It is safest not to drink while pregnant' from the Australian organisation DrinkWise.

Figure 1: Example of a pictogram warning about drinking in pregnancy



The pictogram comes in a variety of types, sizes and colours. Some imported alcohol may have different warning messages. For example, in the United States of America it is mandatory to include the following message on all alcohol products: 'GOVERNMENT WARNING: According to

¹ <http://www.alcohol.org.nz/alcohol-its-effects/alcohol-and-pregnancy/what-you-need-to-know>

² <http://foodregulation.gov.au/internet/fr/publishing.nsf/Content/activities-pregnancy-warnings-on-alcohol-labels>

the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects'.³

HPA commissioned an online survey in June 2016 to assess awareness and understanding of pregnancy warning labels (Rout & Hannan, 2016). This found that 10% of respondents recalled pregnancy warning labels when specifically asked about these. On visual prompting, 25% recalled the pictogram and 29% recalled the DrinkWise text on visual prompting. Recall was higher in younger women (18-34 years) than in the total survey sample. This survey did not ask about attitudes to pregnancy warning labels.

This report

This report presents descriptive results on New Zealanders' attitudes to, and awareness of, pregnancy warning labels on alcohol from the 2015/16 ABAS.

The primary focus of this report is to describe attitudes towards pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products for all respondents, as well as for different demographic groups. Awareness of pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products is then presented for women aged 18 to 44 years only. All results in this report are weighted so that they are representative of the total New Zealand population aged 15 years and over.

³ <http://www.iard.org/policy-tables/health-warning-labeling-requirements/>

METHOD

Survey

ABAS is a nationally representative survey of all usually resident New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. The survey includes questions on about alcohol consumption patterns, alcohol-related behaviour and a range of attitudes and opinions towards alcohol. Results from the survey are used to inform the planning and development of alcohol activities, policies and programmes that aim to reduce alcohol-related harm in New Zealand.

For each survey, approximately 4,000 people aged 15 years and over were surveyed over four months – November, December, January, and February. Households were stratified into telephone directory regions. A random sample of telephone numbers was generated from all number ranges found in the White Pages using a Random Digit Dialling (RDD) approach. The mode of the interview was Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). A full description of each year's methods and further ABAS publications can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

Attitudes to, and awareness of, pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products

There were 4,000 responses in the 2015/16 survey (excluding a boost sample of 200 Pacific respondents). The data have been weighted (adjusted) so that the sample reflects the makeup of the New Zealand population at the 2013 Census. Results are presented as weighted estimates with error bars representing the 95% confidence intervals. The confidence level for comparing estimates by subgroup was set at 95%.

Four questions in the 2015/16 ABAS assessed attitudes about, and awareness of, pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products:

1. All respondents were asked: *'Do you think that messages or symbols about not drinking during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products?'* Responses were recorded as 'yes' or 'no'.
2. Women aged 18 to 44 years were asked *'In the past year, have you seen any messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant?'* Responses were recorded as 'yes' or 'no'.
3. Women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen messages/symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant in the past year were asked *'Please describe what you have seen'*. Respondents could provide multiple responses, which were coded into categories.
4. Women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen messages/symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant in the past year were asked *'What were these messages or symbols telling people?'* Respondents could provide multiple responses, which were coded into categories.

Subgroup analyses were calculated for key demographic groups. These were:

- gender (male, female) for the first question only
- age (15 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years, 45 to 54 years and 55+ years for the first question; 18 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years for the remaining questions)
- prioritised ethnicity (prioritised in the order of Māori, Pacific, Asian, European/Other)
- household income (<\$50,000, \$50,001 to \$100,000, >\$100,000)
- highest attained education level (none = no formal qualification; high school = New Zealand School Certificate, NCEA Level 1, 2 or 3, National Certificate Level 1, 2 or 3, New Zealand Higher School Certificate, Higher Leaving Certificate, University Entrance, Bursary Scholarship; trade = trade or technical certificate, professional qualification or undergraduate diploma; degree = undergraduate or postgraduate degree; other = don't know or refused responses).

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of respondents are outlined in Table 1 below for all respondents, and in Table 2 for female respondents aged 18 to 44 years.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of ABAS 2015/16 respondents

		All respondents	
		Number	Percent (%)
<i>Total</i>		4,000	
<i>Gender</i>	Female	2,075	52
	Male	1,925	48
<i>Age</i>	15 – 24 years	734	18
	25 – 34 years	456	11
	35 – 44 years	830	21
	45 – 54 years	558	14
	55 + years	1,422	36
<i>Prioritised ethnicity</i>	Māori	731	18
	Pacific	218	5
	Asian	422	11
	Other	2,629	66
<i>Household Income (Applies to respondents aged 18+ N=3,596).</i>	< \$50,000	949	26
	\$50,001 - \$100,000	1,138	32
	> \$100,000	1,011	28
	No response	498	14
<i>Education</i>	None	325	8
	High school	1,537	38
	Trade	754	19
	Degree	1,170	29
	Other*	214	5

* Includes don't know/refused responses.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of ABAS 2015/16 female respondents aged 18 to 44 years

Female respondents			
		Number	Percent (%)
<i>Total</i>		887	
<i>Age</i>	18 – 24 years	170	19
	25 – 34 years	250	28
	35 – 44 years	467	53
<i>Education</i>	None	31	4
	High school	305	34
	Trade	141	16
	Degree	365	41
	Other*	45	5

* Includes don't know/refused responses.

ATTITUDES TO ALCOHOL PREGNANCY WARNING MESSAGES

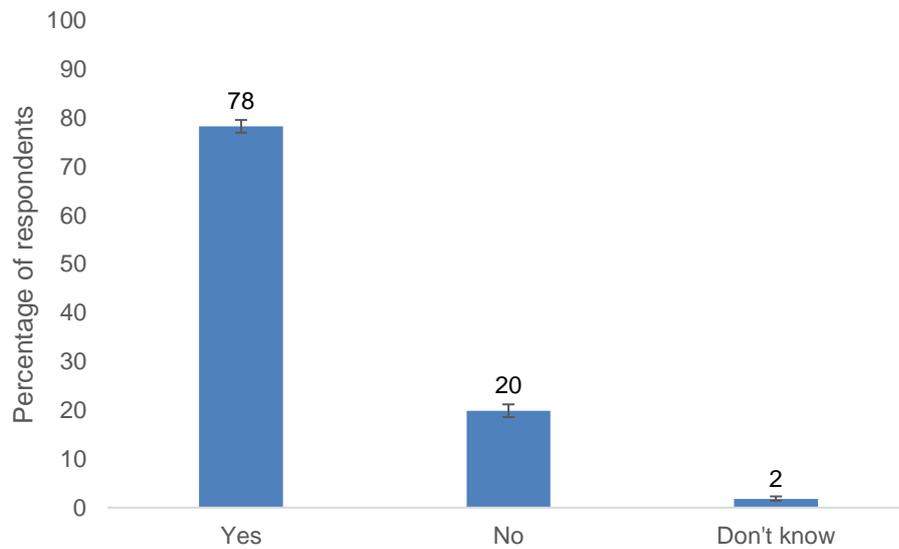
All respondents were asked: *'Do you think that messages or symbols about not drinking during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products?'*

Overall, 78% [95% CI: 77, 80] of respondents indicated 'yes' (see Figure 2). As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, 'yes' responses were higher among:

- females (compared with males)
- 15 to 24-year-olds, 45 to 54-year-olds, and those aged 55+ (compared with 25 to 34-year-olds)
- Pacific and Asian respondents (compared with those identifying as European/Other)
- those with a household income of less than \$50,000 (compared with those with a household income of more than \$100,000).

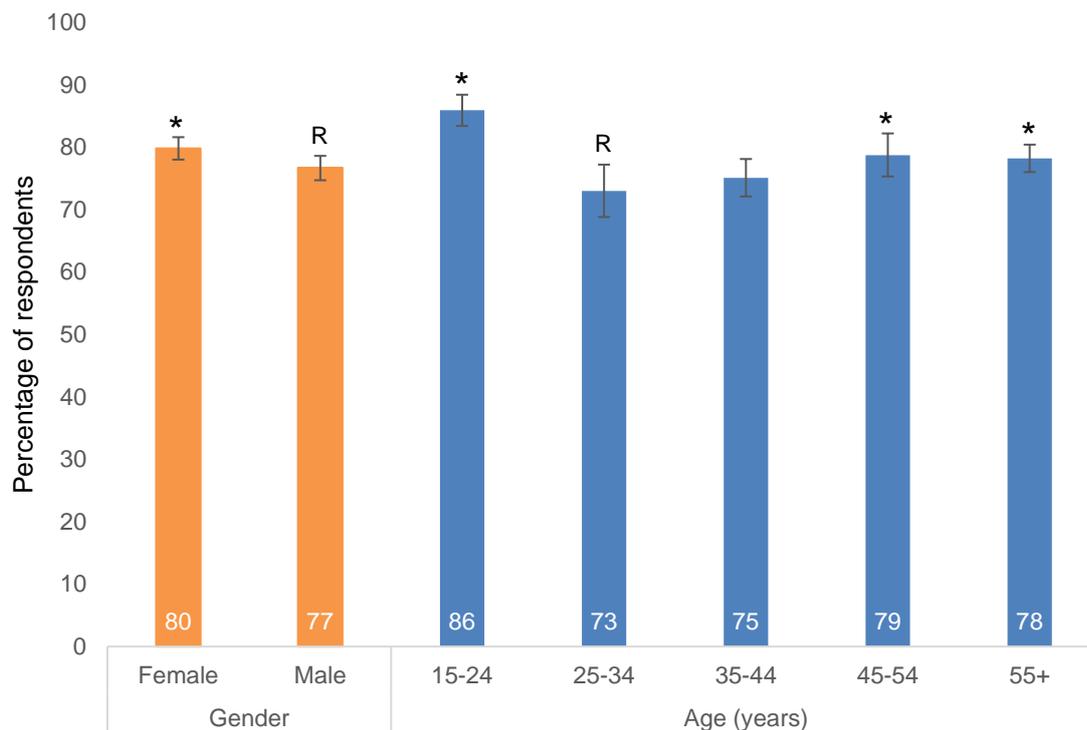
There were no significant differences in response by level of education.

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who said 'yes', 'no', or 'don't know' when asked whether messages or symbols about not drinking alcohol during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products



Base = All respondents (ABAS 2015/16), (n = 4,000).

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who said 'yes' when asked whether messages or symbols about not drinking alcohol during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products, by gender and age



Base = All respondents (ABAS 2015/16), (n = 4,000).

*Significantly different from the reference group (indicated with 'R').

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents who said ‘yes’ when asked whether messages or symbols about not drinking alcohol during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products, by ethnicity and household income



Base = All respondents (ABAS 2015/16), (n = 4,000).

*Significantly different from the reference group (indicated with ‘R’).

AWARENESS OF PREGNANCY WARNING MESSAGES IN WOMEN

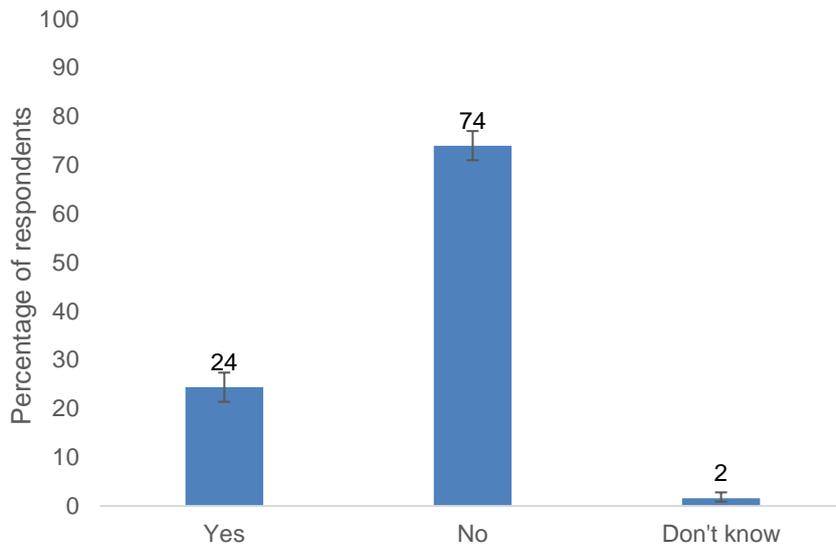
Women aged 18 to 44 years (N = 887) were asked ‘*In the past year, have you seen any messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant?*’ This question was asked of this age group given that they were the main target audience for these messages.

Overall, 24% [95% CI: 21, 27] of respondents indicated ‘yes’ (see Figure 5). As shown in Figure 6, the proportion of respondents indicating ‘yes’ was lower among:

- 35 to 44-year-olds (compared with 18 to 24-year-olds)
- Pacific and Asian respondents (compared with those identifying as European/Other).

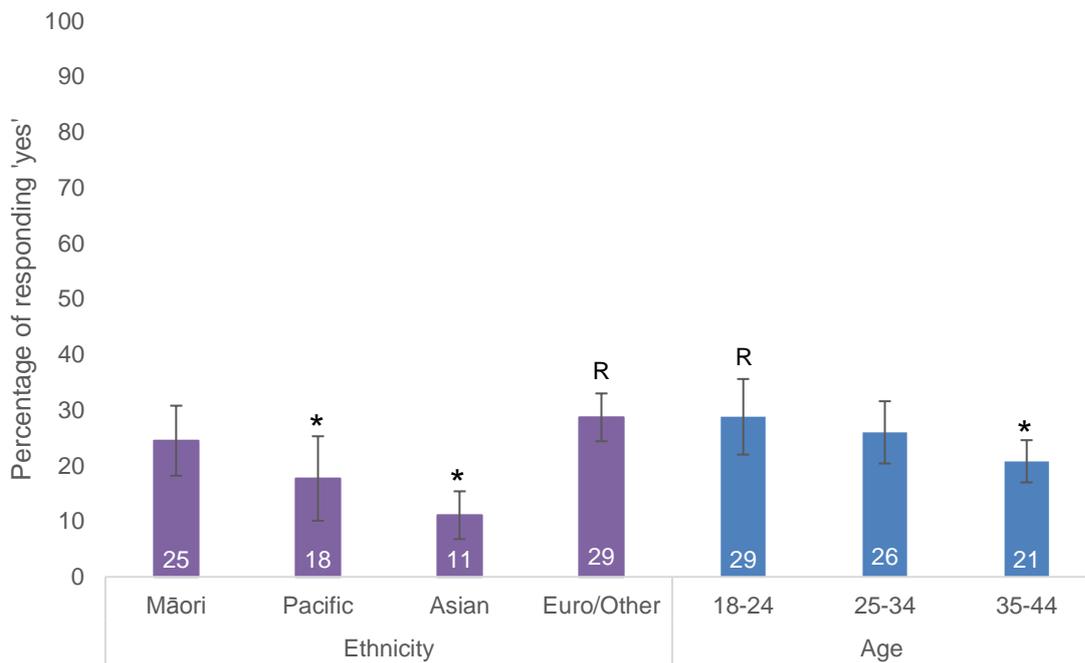
There were no significant differences in response by level of education or household income.

Figure 5. Percentage of respondents who said 'no', 'yes', or 'don't know' when asked whether they had seen in the past year messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant



Base = Women aged 18 to 44 years (ABAS 2015/16), (n = 887).

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who said 'yes' they had seen in the past year messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant, by ethnicity and age



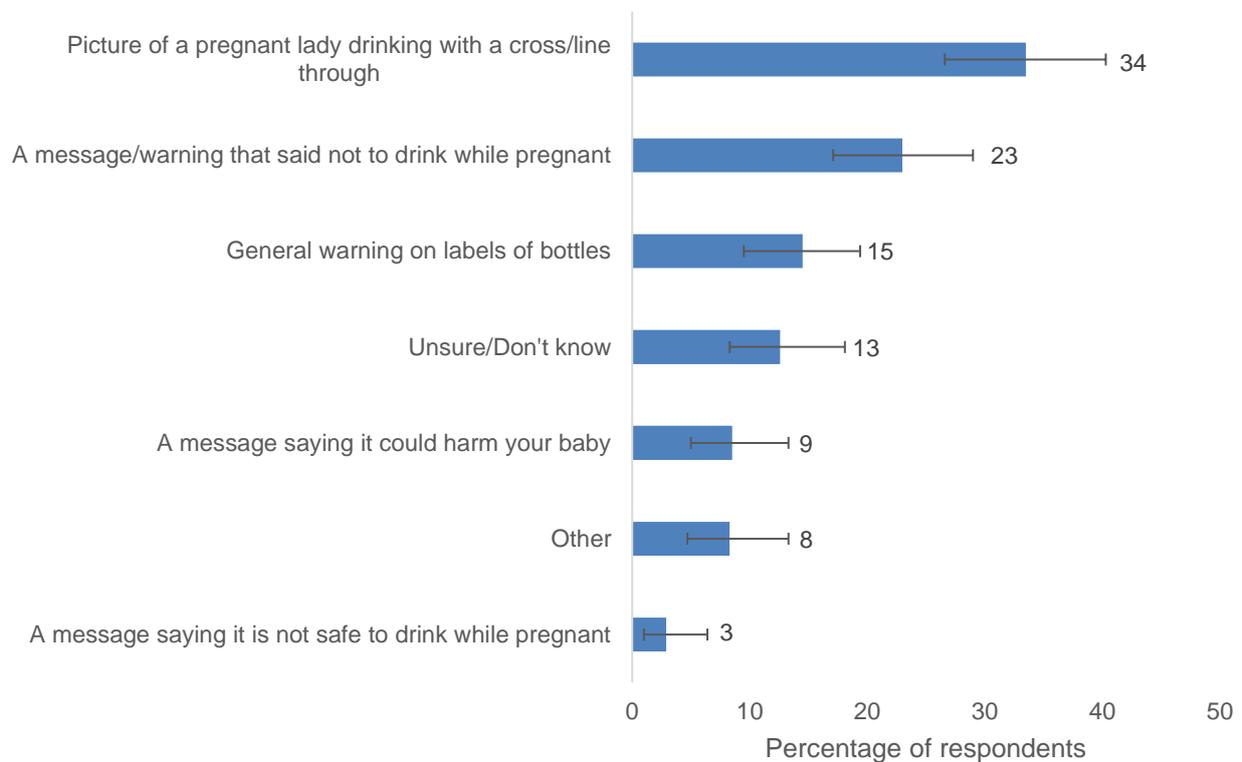
Base = Women aged 18 to 44 years (ABAS 2015/16), (n = 887).
 *Significantly different from the reference group (indicated with 'R').

There were 206 women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen in the past year messages/symbols on alcohol products about not drinking while pregnant. These women were asked to describe what they had seen.

As shown in Figure 7, respondents most commonly described a:

- picture of a pregnant lady drinking with a cross/line through (34%)
- message/warning that said not to drink while pregnant (23%)
- general warning on labels of bottles (15%).

Figure 7. Types of alcohol pregnancy warning labels seen by respondents



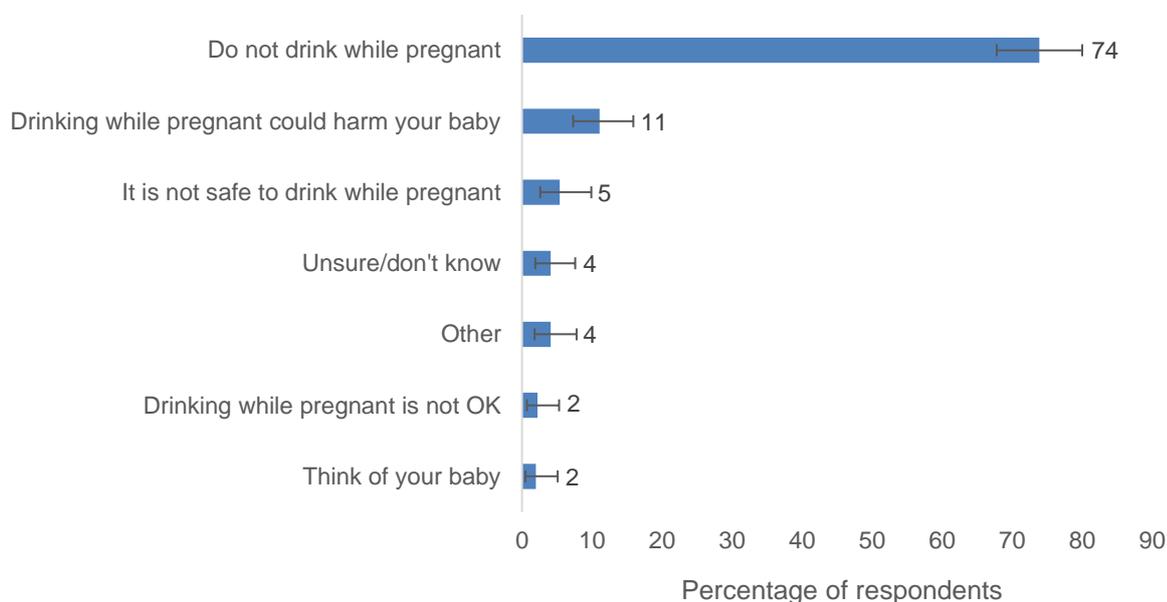
Base = Women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen messages or symbols on alcohol about drinking while pregnant in the past year (ABAS 2015/16), n = 206.

UNDERSTANDING OF WARNING MESSAGES

Those women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen in the past year messages/symbols on alcohol products about not drinking while pregnant were asked *'What were these messages or symbols telling people?'* Respondents could provide multiple responses, which were coded into categories.

As shown in Figure 8, the most common response was 'do not drink while pregnant' (74%). This response is broadly consistent with HPA's statement 'Stop drinking alcohol if you could be pregnant, are pregnant or are trying to get pregnant. There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy'.

Figure 8. The messages that respondents thought were conveyed by the alcohol pregnancy warning label they saw



Base = Women aged 18 to 44 years who indicated they had seen messages or symbols on alcohol about drinking while pregnant in the past year (ABAS 2015/16), n = 206.

REFERENCES

- FASD Working Group. (2016). *Taking Action on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: 2016-2019*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Ministry for Primary Industries. (2014). *Evaluation of voluntary pregnancy labelling on alcohol products in New Zealand. MPI Technical Paper 2014/17* (Vol. 3923). Wellington; Ministry for Primary Industries.
- Rout, J., & Hannan, T. (2016). *Consumer awareness and understanding of alcohol pregnancy warning labels*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.
- Williams, J. F., Smith, V. C., & Committee on Substance Abuse. (2015). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. *Pediatrics*, 136(5), e1395–e1406.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF NON-SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The main body of this report presents results for subgroups only when there were significant differences across the relevant variable. For completeness, Table 3 shows results for subgroups where there were no statistically significant effects.

Table 3: Summary of non-significant effects - Percentage of respondents in each subgroup who said 'yes' to each question

	Do you think that messages or symbols about not drinking alcohol during pregnancy should be on all alcohol products?	In the past year, have you seen any messages or symbols on alcohol products about drinking while pregnant?
	% Yes [95% CI]	% Yes [95% CI]
Base	All respondents	Women aged 18-44
Education (highest qualification)		
None	79 [75, 84]	17 [7, 34]
High school	80 [78, 82]	26 [21, 32]
Trade	76 [72, 79]	18 [12, 26]
Degree	78 [75, 80]	28 [23, 33]
Other	74 [65, 83]	No values
Household income		
< \$50,000	-	23 [16, 31]
\$50,000 to \$100,000	-	26 [21, 32]
> \$100,000	-	25 [20, 30]
No response	-	18 [11, 26]

- Proportion not shown as there was a significant difference across that variable (refer to the body of this report)