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**Circular Letter: 13-5-586**

**TO:** Chief Executive Officers, Acute Care Hospitals with Maternal and Newborn Services/Birthing Centers

**FROM:** Lauren A. Smith, MD, MPH, Interim Commissioner  
Madeleine Biondolillo, MD, Director, BHCSQ

**DATE:** May 9, 2013

**RE:** Guidelines for Community Standard for Maternal/Newborn Screening for Alcohol/Substance Use

The purpose of this letter is to provide guidelines for a community standard and consensus approach to the screening and testing of pregnant women and their newborns for exposure to drugs or alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol and/or substance use during pregnancy adversely affects the health of mothers and infants.

Substance exposed newborns are at risk for a variety of problems, including medical conditions, growth issues, developmental delays, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and child abuse and neglect.<sup>1</sup> Identifying pregnancies complicated by substance use has implications for maternal, fetal, and newborn health. Screening and testing for substances in pregnancy is a complex issue with medical, social, ethical, and legal implications.

The recommendations in the attached guidelines were adopted as the result of a comprehensive literature review, reviews of existing guidelines from other states, and input from a group of physicians, nurses and other stakeholders convened by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and members of the MDPH Perinatal Advisory Committee. The goals of this initiative were to effectively identify infants at risk, to standardize screening/testing guidelines for both mothers and children, and to provide services to families with unhealthy substance use to ensure a future that is safe, healthy, and successful for both the child and the family.

We strongly encourage you to review the attached guidelines and implement policies and procedures that incorporate these recommendations at your hospital. If you have any questions about the information in this correspondence, please email [Ruth.Karacek@state.ma.us](mailto:Ruth.Karacek@state.ma.us) or call 617-624-6023.

**We request that you forward this circular letter to the following staff at your hospital, and any others as appropriate:** Chief Medical Officer, Chief of Obstetrics, Chief of Pediatrics, Chief of Neonatology, Chief Nursing Officer, Director of Maternal and Child Health, and QA Director/Risk Manager.

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 Guidelines for Perinatal Care, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. AAP, Elk Grove, IL, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology.