

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Preventing Birth Defects

Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality. Each year in the United States about 120,000 babies are born with a birth defect.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network has designated January as Birth Defects Prevention month to highlight the public health importance of birth defects. Public health campaigns to increase folic acid consumption and stop high-risk behaviors during pregnancy are making progress in decreasing the number of children born with preventable birth defects.

One birth defect that is 100% preventable is Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). FAS is a set of physical and mental birth defects. It is an irreversible, lifelong condition that affects every aspect of a child's life and the lives of the child's family. It is estimated that 1 in 1,000 children born each year in the United States has FAS. FAS can occur when a woman drinks alcohol during her pregnancy. There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant. Women should not drink alcohol when they are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or at risk of becoming pregnant.

There are steps that women can take to decrease their chance of having a baby with a birth defect.

- ✓ Women of childbearing age should take a *daily* multivitamin which contains 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid. Folic acid consumption reduces the risk of having a baby with spina bifida, and possibly other birth defects including cleft lip or palate and heart defects.
- ✓ All women should be appropriately immunized; of special focus are women born outside the US who have not received rubella immunizations. Exposure in the first trimester of pregnancy results in congenital rubella syndrome that can cause serious heart, hearing and vision defects.
- ✓ Women should not smoke, drink alcohol or use recreational drugs during pregnancy. 1 in 4 women in Branch-Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties report smoking while pregnant, something we need to work to reduce.

For more information about birth defects prevention, contact the National Birth Defects Prevention Network at www.nbdpn.org or the Branch-Hillsdale-St Joseph Community Health Agency at one of our four locations: Coldwater (517) 279-9561, Hillsdale (517) 437-7395, Sturgis (269) 659-4013, or Three Rivers (269) 273-2161 or visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

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