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2007 – Michigan’s Year of Public Health
Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency
Kicks off Healthy Beginnings Month

Coldwater, Michigan, March 1 2007 - Good health before pregnancy helps to protect a baby’s growth and development. March is designated as “Healthy Beginnings” month, and the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency (CHA) officials are reminding women to take good care of themselves before, during, and after pregnancy to give their babies a healthy start.

“Long before a women is ready to be pregnant, the decisions she makes, such as using effective family planning methods, taking steps to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and taking a daily vitamin containing Folic Acid help her chances of having a healthy pregnancy,” said CHA’s Director of Prevention, Jennie Sholly.

Once a woman is pregnant, CHA offers many services to help ensure a healthy baby, especially for low-income women.

“We offer maternal support programs, including the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program, not only because we care about women and babies but because they are good investment”, said Sholly “In fact, for every dollar spent on WIC, \$3.50 is saved in future costs; saving lives means saving dollars.”

Good nutrition prevents many health problems in babies. The best food for most babies is breastmilk. Breast-feeding lowers a child’s risk for many types of infections and allergies and may also help protect children from some health problems, such as eczema and asthma. Health Department officials encourage moms to breastfeed until their babies are 12 months old, or longer.

“The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is always working to promote healthy babies, encouraging good nutrition, sleep routines, and lots of TLC”, said Sholly. “Promoting healthy babies also means making sure parents know they need to secure their child in a car seat when riding in a motor vehicle.”

Despite the best preparation, some babies are born with disabilities. Then, Health Department staff coordinates Children’s Special Health Care Services, which provides financial assistance for health care for certain medical conditions.

For additional information about preparing for a healthy pregnancy and baby, contact your Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency office in Hillsdale County 437-7395 Branch County 279-9561, in St. Joseph County-Sturgis 659-4013 and Three Rivers 273-2161 or visit the www.bhsj.org and www.nwhealth.org websites.

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