

NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Dalrymple Proclaims January *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota

Bismarck, N.D. –In proclaiming January as Birth Defects Prevention Month, Gov. Dalrymple recognizes the importance important steps women can take to avoid birth defects. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) invites women and their families to make a **PACT** for birth defects prevention. In recognition of January 2016 as *National Birth Defects Prevention Month*, the NDDoH is encouraging healthcare professionals, educators, social service professionals, and the general public to support this effort. Every 4 ½ minutes, a baby is born with a birth defect in the U.S. Not all birth defects can be prevented, but, women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant.

This year NDDoH encourages all women to make a **PACT** for their own health and the family they may have one day:

Plan Ahead.
Avoid Harmful Substances.
Choose a Healthy Lifestyle.
Talk to Your Healthcare Provider.

By making the **PACT**, women can reduce the risk of having a child with a birth defect and also reduce their risk of pregnancy complications, such as early pregnancy loss, prematurity and stillbirths.

About 120,000 babies are affected by birth defects each year in the U.S. In 2013, 280 babies were affected by birth defects in North Dakota. Not only can birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disability, they are also the most common cause of death in the first year of life and the second most common cause of death in children aged one to four years. Public awareness, expert medical care, accurate and early diagnosis, and social support systems are essential for optimal prevention and treatment of these all-too-common and sometimes deadly conditions.

“Most people are unaware of how common, costly, and critical birth defects are in the United States, or that there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of birth defects,” says Devaiah Muccatira of the NDDoH. “The health of women prior to pregnancy can affect the risk of having a child with a birth defect. Diet,

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life-style choices, factors in the environment, health conditions and medications before and during pregnancy all can play a role in preventing or increasing the risk of birth defects,” says Muccatira. “Small steps, like making healthy choices, visiting a healthcare provider well before pregnancy, controlling your weight through healthy diet and activity, and taking a multivitamin every day, can go a long way,” says Muccatira.

The NDDoH is participating in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by distributing information, encouraging prevention, and increasing awareness of birth defects in North Dakota. “We are excited to be part of this campaign and encourage others active participation by sharing tips for healthy pregnancy using #LivingMyPACT on social media.” says Muccatira.

Children’s Special Health Services is a division within the North Dakota Department of Health that offers services for many children with birth defects. For more information about services available and about *Birth Defects Prevention Month*, contact Devaiah Muccatira, NDDoH, at 701.328.4963 or dmuccatira@nd.gov.

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ndhealth or twitter at twitter.com/nddoh.

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PROCLAMATION
BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH
JANUARY 2016

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. While many unknown factors play a role in birth defects occurrence, steps can be taken to help prevent or limit certain risks for birth defects, such as exposure to chemicals in the home or at work, use of alcohol and recreational drugs, a lack of folic acid in a woman's diet, and lack of prenatal care. Therefore, let's make a **PACT** for prevention! **P**lan ahead, **A**void harmful substances, **C**hoose a healthy lifestyle, and **T**alk to your healthcare provider.

Whereas, Every 4 ½ minutes, a U.S. baby is born with a birth defect. Birth defects are a leading cause of death in the first year of life, causing one in every five infant deaths. These conditions lead to \$2.6 billion per year in hospital costs alone in the United States. In North Dakota birth defects accounted for 49 infant deaths in 2014; and

Whereas, Birth defects can occur in any family regardless of race, ethnicity, health history, economic status, or level of education; and

Whereas, About half of all pregnancies are unplanned, contributing to late entry into prenatal care and presenting a barrier to optimal pregnancy management, particularly during the crucial first weeks of a baby's development; and

Whereas, Early identification of a child with a birth defect coupled with early intervention services typically improves the child's quality of life and may even save his or her life; and

Whereas, Managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant can help increase a woman's chance of having a healthy baby. The National Birth Defects Prevention Network and CDC encourage parents-to-be to make a **PACT** for prevention to take steps to help reduce their risk for birth defects. These steps include:

Planning ahead for pregnancy
Avoiding harmful substances
Choosing a healthy lifestyle
Talking to a healthcare provider before and during pregnancy; and

Whereas, The good health and well-being of the people of North Dakota are enhanced by the support of a national effort to educate about preconception health and strategies to prevent birth defects; and

Whereas, The North Dakota Department of Health and the Division of Children's Special Health Services join with the March of Dimes, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network, as well as many dedicated volunteers, healthcare professionals, and parent groups by participating in this promotion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jack Dalrymple, Governor of the State of North Dakota, do hereby proclaim January 2016 as NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH.

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