

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Planning For Pregnancy Can Reduce the Risk of Birth Defects**

BISMARCK, N.D. – In January, as part of National Birth Defects Prevention Month, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) Family Planning Program encourages women who may become pregnant and men who may become fathers to adopt healthy practices now to decrease the risk that a child will be born with birth defects. Planning for pregnancy is one of the most important things you can do to give your child a healthy start in life. Birth defects affect one in every 33 babies born in the United States each year, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Not all birth defects can be prevented, but men and women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by becoming healthier themselves before pregnancy.

The CDC recommends the following to decrease birth defects:

- Improving knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of men and women regarding preconception health
- Assuring that all women of childbearing age in the United States receive preconception care services that will help them to begin pregnancy in optimal health
- Reducing risks indicated by a previous adverse pregnancy outcome through health interventions between pregnancies
- Reducing the disparities in adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as poverty and poor access to health care

The Department of Health and local statewide family planning programs are committed to meeting the CDC goals. Diabetes, hypertension, obesity, depression, and sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis) are among the many medical conditions that can cause poor pregnancy outcomes among women of reproductive age, according to the CDC. “These risk factors are treatable and, if identified prior to pregnancy, can help decrease the chances of delivering a baby with a birth defect or born with significant complications,”

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according to Amy Burke, Optimal Pregnancy Outcome Program Director at the NDDoH. Burke added that birth defects account for more than 20 percent of infant deaths and are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in infants.

“Taking control of your reproductive health is an important step to ensure that our children have the best start possible,” says Burke. “We encourage all women and men to think about what their life plans are and how they can live the healthiest life possible. Talk with your health care provider about what you can do to maximize your health and decrease your risk of having a baby with a birth defect.”

The Family Planning Program of the NDDoH oversees federally funded clinics throughout the state, which provide confidential, affordable reproductive life services to women and men. For more information about available services or about Birth Defects Prevention Month, contact Amy Burke, at 701.328.2784.

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