

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Recognizes January as Birth Defects Prevention Month

Bismarck, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, March of Dimes, Teratology Society, and Mother to Baby to increase awareness on how to prevent birth defects. During National Birth Defects Prevention Month, a special emphasis is placed on the importance of preventing infections before and during pregnancy that can increase the risk of having a baby with a birth defect.

In the United States, a baby is born with a birth defect every 4½ minutes - about 120,000 babies each year - with around 108 cases occurring in North Dakota in 2016. Birth defects are the most common cause of death in the first year of life and the second most common cause of death in children age 1 to 4 years.

"While not all birth defects are preventable, there are many things pregnant women and women who may become pregnant can do to increase the chance of having a healthy baby," says Dr. Connell, pediatrician and NDDoH field medical officer.

Healthy choices include:

Get vaccinated before you become pregnant.

- The flu shot and Tdap are recommended with every pregnancy.

Prevent insect bites.

- Use insect repellent; follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
- Consider avoiding travel to areas with Zika virus.

Practice good hygiene.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid putting a young child's cup or pacifier in your mouth.
- Talk to your health care provider.
- Ask how you can prevent infections, such as Zika virus.

- Discuss how to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

Treat your body well.

- Eat a healthy diet
- Take a daily multivitamin containing 400 micrograms folic acid
- Be physically active regularly and get an adequate amount of sleep

These steps can go a long way in promoting a healthy you and a healthy baby!

For more information about services available, visit the NDDoH Special Health Services website at www.ndhealth.gov/cshs or contact Devaiah Muccatira, NDDoH, at 701.328.4963 or dmuccatira@nd.gov.

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