

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**IMPROVING WOMEN'S PRE-PREGNANCY HEALTH: KEY TO IMPROVING BIRTH OUTCOMES**

**TALLAHASSEE-** A healthy pregnancy begins with a healthy mother. The Florida Department of Health's new *Baby Steps* campaign encourages women to plan for a healthy pregnancy by reaching or maintaining a healthy weight, taking a multi-vitamin containing folic acid, and getting regular medical and dental check-ups prior to pregnancy.

"Because nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, it's important that all women take steps to maintain their health, even if they aren't planning on becoming pregnant," said Deputy Secretary for Health Dr. Dennis Cookro. "Taking a multi-vitamin with folic acid is especially important because folic acid only works to help prevent birth defects if taken before and during the first few weeks of pregnancy."

A balanced diet and regular exercise can help women reach a healthy weight prior to pregnancy. Women who are overweight or obese are at increased risk of experiencing pregnancy complications and poor birth outcomes including preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, pre-term birth, miscarriage or stillbirth. Regardless of their weight, all women should talk to their healthcare provider about exercise programs that will help prepare their bodies for the challenges of childbirth and motherhood. Walking, swimming, riding a stationary bike or taking pregnancy aerobic or yoga classes are typically safe forms of exercise for pregnant women.

While most women understand the importance of prenatal care, many don't realize that their dental health can also impact their babies' health. Regular dental check-ups are recommended both before and during pregnancy. Periodontal disease, a bacterial infection that can lead to destruction of the gums, bones, and ligaments supporting teeth, has also been linked to premature delivery and low birth weight infants.

Pregnancy also impacts women's oral health in several ways which can result in an increase in tooth decay. Treatment of tooth decay in pregnant women improves the overall health of the mother and also helps decrease the transmission of bacteria from the mother to the infant.

For more tips on baby steps toward pre-pregnancy health, call Florida's Family Health Line at 1-800-451-2229.

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**Florida Department of Health**

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