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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTES BETTER HEALTH FOR BABIES DURING NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH



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TALLAHASSEE, Fla.— As part of National Birth Defects Prevention Month, the Florida Department of Health is raising awareness about the important steps families can take to improve the health of babies and reduce the impact of birth defects. Of the more than 220,000 babies born in Florida each year, one in 33 may be diagnosed with a major birth defect before their first birthday. This year's theme is Prevent Infections for Baby's Protection and it is especially relevant as Zika virus poses a significant risk to pregnant women and their babies.

"Florida's most precious resource is our children and we are committed to improving the health of babies," said State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. Celeste Philip. "Babies born with birth defects are a serious matter in Florida and worldwide, especially as the risk of Zika infection increases around the globe. Our surveillance program allows us to monitor the numbers and types of birth defects that are occurring so we can develop prevention, intervention, education and referral programs to assist affected individuals, families and their health care providers."

Zika infection during pregnancy poses a significant risk to a developing baby. Zika can cause a birth defect called microcephaly, as well as other severe fetal brain defects. Babies with microcephaly often have smaller brains that might not have developed properly. Pregnant women are urged to prevent mosquito bites to protect against Zika infection and follow [CDC's](#) recommendations to prevent sexual transmission if a partner has traveled to a Zika-impacted area, as the virus can also be transmitted sexually.

Infections before and during pregnancy can have serious consequences for the mother-to-be and the developing baby. Although not all birth defects can be prevented, steps can be taken to increase a woman's chance of having a healthy baby. Women and their loved ones can participate in these strategies and take these important steps toward a healthy pregnancy. This year the department is encouraging all women to prevent infections to protect their babies by observing the following guidelines.

- Talk to your health care provider.
 - Before pregnancy, discuss healthy weight goals and ways to prevent or address chronic diseases;
 - Know what you can do to prevent infections and make sure that you are up-to-date with vaccinations before getting pregnant; and

- During pregnancy, begin prenatal care during the first trimester and keep all scheduled appointments to ensure you receive appropriate screenings and vaccines.
- Take a daily multivitamin with folic acid in it.
 - All women, but especially those who want to become pregnant, need 400 micrograms of folic acid every day;
 - Folic acid can help prevent major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine; and
 - Birth defects of the brain and spine happen in the first few weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant, so it is important to get 400 mcg of folic acid every day for all women who can get pregnant or are trying to get pregnant.
- Properly prepare food.
 - Wash your hands before and after preparing food;
 - Do not eat raw or runny eggs or raw sprouts; and
 - Avoid unpasteurized (raw) milk and cheese and other foods made from them.
- Protect yourself from animals and insects known to carry diseases such as Zika virus.
 - When mosquitoes and ticks are active, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside;
 - Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus (para-menthane-3,8-diol); and
 - Stay away from wild or pet rodents, live poultry, lizards and turtles and do not clean cat litter boxes while pregnant.
- Maintain good hygiene.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before preparing or eating foods, after handling raw foods or unwashed vegetables, after being around or touching pets or animals and after changing diapers or wiping running noses; and
 - Do not put a young child's food, utensils, drinking cups or pacifiers in your mouth.

For more information about Zika and pregnancy, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [website](#).

The Florida Birth Defects Registry is a statewide population-based surveillance system that identifies children born with birth defects with the goal of determining risk factors, identifying at-risk populations and promoting collaboration to prevent birth defects and reduce associated morbidity and mortality. For more information about the prevention of birth defects in Florida, please visit www.fbdr.org.

The department also partners with the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) and the 2017 NBDPN Birth Defects Prevention information packet is available online at: <http://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm.php>.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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