

January 22, 2018

FLORIDA HEALTH ENCOURAGES STEPS TO PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS



Contact:

Communications Office

NewsMedia@flhealth.gov

850-245-4111

TALLAHASSEE – 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. January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month and the department is encouraging women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy to *Prevent Infections for Baby's Protection*.

“Children are Florida’s most precious resource, and we want all moms to have safe pregnancies and healthy full-term babies,” said State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. Celeste Philip. “Our Florida Birth Defects Registry surveillance program enables 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. While not all birth defects can be prevented, taking certain proactive steps can increase the likelihood of having a healthy baby.”

Of the more than 220,000 babies born in Florida each year, **1 in 28** may be diagnosed with a major birth defect before their first birthday. Birth defects are common, costly and critical. Infections before and during pregnancy can have serious consequences for the mother-to-be and the developing baby.

Women and their loved ones can participate in these strategies and take these important steps toward a healthy pregnancy. This year we are encouraging all women to prevent infections and protect their babies by observing the following guidelines:

- Talk to your health care provider.
 - Talk to your health care provider about what you can do to prevent infections.
 - Make sure that you are up-to-date with vaccinations (shots) before getting pregnant and know what vaccines you should receive during pregnancy
- Maintain good hygiene.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially
 - Before preparing or eating foods;
 - After handling raw meat, raw eggs, or unwashed vegetables;
 - After being around or touching pets and other animals; and
 - After changing diapers or wiping runny noses.
 - Do not put a young child’s food, utensils, drinking cups, or pacifiers in your mouth.
- Properly prepare food.

- Wash your hands before and after preparing food.
- Do not eat raw or runny eggs or raw sprouts.
- 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 and rabies.
 - 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).
 - Stay away from wild or pet rodents, live poultry, lizards and turtles, and do not clean cat litter boxes while pregnant.

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 2018 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.

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.