



## NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECT PREVENTION MONTH 2021

January 05, 2021- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, birth defects occur in about 1 in every 33 infants born in the United States per year. That's why during National Birth Defect Prevention Month in January, District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) is seeking to increase public knowledge of five critical tips to reduce the chances of birth defects in babies.

"Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before and during pregnancy," said Anne Bianchi, MS, RD, Director of District Health Department #10's Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program. "Taking care of yourself and doing what's best for you is also best for your baby!"

Women should note the following steps to increase chances for a healthy baby:

- 1. Before getting pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.**
  - Obesity increases the risk of several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications.
  - If you are underweight, overweight or have obesity talk with your healthcare provider about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight before getting pregnant.
- 2. Take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.**
  - Folic acid is a vitamin that can be taken prior to becoming pregnant as well as during pregnancy.
  - It is very important to take while pregnant because it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine.
- 3. Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medication.**
  - There are often benefits to continuing treatment throughout pregnancy. Discussing a treatment plan before a pregnancy allows a woman and her health care provider to weigh the pros and cons of all options to keep mom and baby as healthy as possible.
- 4. Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.**
  - Having the right vaccinations, like the flu and Tdap vaccines, at the right time during pregnancy can help keep a woman and her baby healthy.
- 5. Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.**
  - There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy and its exposure can cause major birth defects.
  - Smoking tobacco and/or marijuana during pregnancy can cause dangerous chemicals to damage the placenta and/or reach baby's bloodstream.
  - The opioid addiction epidemic has led to a sharp increase in Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), premature birth and drug withdrawal in developing babies.



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