

Dear Health Care Professional:

January is Birth Defects Prevention Month. As you may know, birth defects are the leading cause of death in children less than one year of age. In (*Your State*), approximately (*XXX*) babies are born with a birth defect each year. Medical care, support services, special education, lost wages, and lost productivity just scratch the surface of the financial and emotional impact of birth defects and disabilities on families, individuals, businesses, and communities.

Realizing that approximately 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned, we believe there is an urgent need to incorporate preconception health into every aspect of health care for women who are in their reproductive years.

The good news is that prevention efforts do offer hope for reducing the number of families in (*Your State*) affected by birth defects. The following prevention strategies can easily be incorporated into your practice:

- **Provide folic acid education as a standard of care.** The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day to prevent up to 70 percent of neural tube defects in the U.S.
- **Educate patients about risks** for diabetes, glycemic control and pregnancy outcomes.
- **Counsel women about the importance** of diet, weight and fitness.
- **Counsel about the importance** of compliance with treatment in women with chronic conditions, and perhaps the need for genetic counseling.
- **Identify and help** victims of domestic violence/abuse.
- **Educate** that during pregnancy, no level of alcohol or tobacco ingestion is suggested for the developing fetus.

You can make a difference in the lives of (*Your State*) families and communities. The National Birth Defects Prevention Network hopes that you will take the time to review this information and make an effort to incorporate the prevention message into your practice. Should you have questions about or would like more information sent to you, please contact _____ (public health/ surveillance program/MCH program/Birth Defects/Genetics Programs).

Sincerely,