

Dear Health Care Professional:

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. As you may know, birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, and the costs, both monetary and non-monetary, to individuals, families, communities and the health care industry are substantial. In (*Your State*), approximately (*XXX*) babies are born with a birth defect each year and nationally, 120,000 babies are affected annually.

Childbearing is a common experience among women in the United States and approximately 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned. Therefore, improving the health of women in their reproductive years before they become pregnant continues to be an important strategy to reduce all adverse pregnancy outcomes.

In 2006, CDC published recommendations to improve preconception health and health care in the United States. Prevention efforts do offer hope for reducing the number of children born with a birth defect in (*Your State*). 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 safe for the developing fetus and cessation is recommended before pregnancy.

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 convey the prevention message to your patients. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact _____ (public health/ surveillance program/MCH program/Birth Defects/Genetics Programs) or visit the National Birth Defects Prevention Network at www.nbdpn.org.

Sincerely,