



January 2016

National Birth Defects Prevention Month

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES TO HELP PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

Make a PACT for Prevention

PLAN AHEAD



Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant



Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day



AVOID HARMFUL SUBSTANCES



Avoid smoking



Avoid drinking alcohol



Be careful with harmful exposures at work and home



CHOOSE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, and lean proteins



Be physically active



Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control



TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER



Get a medical checkup



Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter



Talk about your family history



Making a PACT to get healthy before and during pregnancy can help you have a healthy baby.

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GREETINGS

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) Education and Outreach Committee is excited to share the 2016 National Birth Defects Prevention Month packet. This packet was developed in collaboration with many partners, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and Teratology Society (TS).

The theme for 2016 is “Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects – Make a **PACT** for Prevention.” We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But, we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before and during pregnancy. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to:

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as possible before becoming pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

NBDPN’s goal for 2016 is to continue the momentum from previous years, increasing awareness that birth defects are “Common, Costly, and Critical” and offering actionable steps that professionals, community groups, and the public can take to prevent birth defects. Specially-designed materials to help you spread the word and engage your communities are available on the NBDPN website and can be tailored to your specific agency’s mission, needs, and capacity.

We hope you find these materials useful as you work to increase awareness of birth defects and highlight prevention activities during January and throughout the year. We ask that you complete the evaluation form (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2016BDPMfeedback>) so we can continue to improve the contents and format of the packet materials.

If you should have questions about National Birth Defects Prevention Month, please contact Mary Knapp (Mary.Knapp@doh.state.nj.us) or Cara Mai (cmai@cdc.gov).

Thank you in advance for your support in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month.

Sincerely,

Mary Knapp and LaShunda Williams
NBDPN Education & Outreach Committee Co-chairs

SHARING THIS PACKET

Materials in this packet can be downloaded from NBDPN at www.nbdpn.org. All materials can be printed, shared, and distributed as needed. Copies of brochures can be requested from their creators and most are available at no cost. Here are a few suggested groups or partners to target for packet dissemination:

- **Schools:** Health educators and school nurses at middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities in your state can share materials with teachers and students. Encourage school health education teachers to incorporate these messages into their lesson plans. Professors at Schools of Nursing and Public Health at both the undergraduate and graduate levels might want to include information in their curricula.
- **Non-profit organizations that have a similar mission:** March of Dimes chapters, advocacy groups, and family support groups, like Family Voices, can promote information to policy makers.
- **Local chapters of professional societies:** Your state's chapter of professional organizations, such as the American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Public Health Association, nursing organizations, and genetic associations can share up-to-date materials through their meetings, newsletters, and conferences.
- **Local services:** Share the information packet with your state's established health programs, including Maternal and Child Health (MCH); Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS); Reproductive Health; Family Planning; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and Medicaid. The Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Program (FIMR) in your state may be interested in prevalence and mortality statistics and prevention resources.
- **Other health programs in your state:** The "making healthy choices" message complements messaging for many chronic disease prevention programs. Promote these materials to your state health department partners and call on them to help disseminate these resources in order to maximize impact.
- **Local health departments & hospitals:** If your state has local public health departments, share this packet with each department. Your state's Health and Hospital Association and healthcare provider organizations may be interested in issues surrounding birth defects and in helping spread prevention messages to their members.
- **Women's services:** Remember that young women are an important demographic to target. Child and Adolescent Health Centers (CAHC), school-based health centers, and family planning clinics can incorporate prevention messages into their programs.

USING MATERIALS IN THIS PACKET

Are you interested in participating in National Birth Defects Prevention Month, but you aren't sure how? We make it easy for you with this list of ideas! Each activity conducted individually or in coordination with partners at the state or community level will raise awareness about birth defects and steps that can be taken to promote healthy pregnancies and positive birth outcomes. We invite you to use the packet to design your own promotions, pick and choose relevant content for your audiences, and copy or adapt contents to take advantage of particular news or issues in your community. Here are a few ideas:

Distribute to local public health and other partners

Send the packet to your local public health departments and other community partners. These partners could include local grantees, non-profits, provider's offices, or clinics.

Send the packet over email as an attachment or as a link to the NBDPN website. You could break down the packet into chunks or tailor the contents to include materials most relevant to partners. For example, send sample drop-in articles to partners to include in their newsletters or post on their websites. Encourage partners to ask you questions, share resources, and tell you about things they use from the packet.

Create a buzz with social media

Collaborate with other sections of your organization that work on topics related to birth defects prevention. For example, the Diabetes Prevention section would make a great partner for "Choosing a Healthy Lifestyle" themed posts. They can connect you to local groups who are committed to these health topics, who may share messages on their social media pages. Provide sample posts (see appendix 1).

Ask if you can post a logo and short description on partner websites for the months of December-January. Link to the National Birth Defects Prevention Network website, or your organization's Birth Defects Prevention Month webpage.

Table at events or in your building

Use the content, wording, and graphics from the packet to stock an informational table. You can create a tri-fold display, handouts for people to take, and more! Staff the table to answer questions, or leave it set up for people to browse. Partners could do this in their locations as well.

Make news

Customize the sample news release with information, stories, or events happening in your community. Submit news releases, articles, and op-eds to local news venues to publish, post on websites, or share through social media.

PACT THEME RESOURCES

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES TO HELP PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

Make a PACT for Prevention

PLAN AHEAD

Planning ahead encourages women and men to focus on their preconception health, which refers to health during the years they can have a baby. Preconception health involves taking steps now to protect the health of a baby they might have sometime in the future. All women and men can benefit from preconception health, whether or not they plan to have a baby one day. Preconception health is about getting and staying healthy overall, throughout their lives. In addition, no one expects an unplanned pregnancy. But, half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Planning ahead involves taking control, setting goals for the future, choosing healthy habits, and taking the steps needed to get there.



Key messages

- **Folic Acid:** Folate (folic acid) is a B vitamin that can help prevent major birth defects of the brain and spine. It is important for all women to get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. For folic acid to help prevent some major birth defects, a woman needs to start taking it at least one month before she becomes pregnant and while she is pregnant. Every woman needs folic acid every day, whether she's planning to get pregnant or not, for the healthy new cells the body makes daily. There are a couple of easy ways to get folic acid: take a vitamin daily with folic acid in it (such as a women's multivitamin or pre-natal vitamin) and eat foods that have added folic acid, like breakfast cereal. It is also important to eat a diet rich in natural folate, like dark leafy greens, beans, and peanuts.
- **Medical checkup:** Get a medical checkup at least once per year. If you have any medical conditions, such as weight control or diabetes, be sure they are in control and being treated. Discuss any medications, both over-the-counter and prescription, with your healthcare provider and make sure you are taking only those that are necessary.
- **Family planning:** Use birth control and make a plan for having children – or not having children! This is especially important if you are taking certain medications or using other substances, including alcohol, that increase the risk for birth defects.

What you can do

- **All adults:** Make a reproductive life plan to think about your goals for school, your job or career, and for other important things in your life. Then, think about how having children fits in with these goals. When you are ready, plan your pregnancy. Whether you are trying to have a baby, or are just thinking about it sometime in the near or distant future, it is never too early to start getting ready for pregnancy: (www.cdc.gov/preconception/documents/reproductivelifeplan-worksheet.pdf).
- **Women who want to become pregnant:** Complete the "Show Your Love - Steps to a Healthier me and baby-to-be" checklist to set goals and make a health plan (www.cdc.gov/preconception/showyourlove/documents/Healthier_Baby_Me_Plan.pdf).

- **Women who do not want to become pregnant:** Complete the “*Show Your Love - Steps to a Healthier me*” checklist to set goals and make a health plan (www.cdc.gov/preconception/showyourlove/documents/Healthier_Me_NonPlan.pdf).

Resources for Families/Women

CDC Preconception Health (www.cdc.gov/preconception/index.html)

Learn what you need to know now to have a safe pregnancy and healthy baby with CDC’s preconception health web portal. The website provides checklists to aid in making preconception health and reproductive life plans.

CDC Folic Acid (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid)

This site provides information on the importance of folic acid for the prevention of birth defects. Also featured are an online CDC folic acid publication order form, a FAQ section, folic acid fact sheets, and a quiz. A version in Spanish is also available.

U.S. Office of Women’s Health - Preconception Health (www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/before-you-get-pregnant/preconception-health.html)

Read about why preconception health matters and how you can prepare for a healthy pregnancy. This website also provides a print-and-go guide to help you talk to your doctor.

What to Expect - Preconception

(www.whattoexpect.com/preconception/landing-page.aspx)

What to Expect provides resources to prepare you for pregnancy as well as a forum to connect with other families and moms-to-be.

Resources for Healthcare Providers

Show Your Love Preconception Health Campaign (www.cdc.gov/showyourlove)

Show Your Love is a national campaign designed to increase the number of women who plan their pregnancies and engage in healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant. For women who don’t want to start a family in the near future or at all, the campaign encourages them to choose healthy behaviors so that they can be their best and achieve the dreams they have for themselves.

Preconception Curriculum (www.beforeandbeyond.org/?page=cme-modules)

This website, designed for physicians providing health care to women who may become pregnant, includes a clinical toolkit, a series of online training modules, guidelines, and practice resources. The training modules’ curriculum includes a series of PowerPoint slide sets, a core module (which should be viewed first), and separate modules for different medical specialties. There are also presentation notes included, which make this an educational tool that may be helpful for teaching residents, fellows, nurses, and primary care providers in conferences, didactic sessions, or Grand Rounds.

Preconception Self-Study Courses (<https://oh.train.org/DesktopShell.aspx>)

The Ohio Department of Health’s Bureau for Children with Special Needs and Michigan Department of Community Health’s Bureau of Disease Control, Prevention and Epidemiology are offering free educational self-study trainings for nursing and other healthcare providers interested in improving the preconception and interconception health of women of childbearing age. These self-studies provide information and resources addressing some common risk factors for poor reproductive outcomes, with a particular emphasis on recognizing and decreasing the risk for birth defects.

Additional resources, including condition-specific information, are available on the NBDPN website at www.nbdpn.org.

A VOID HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

Certain substances, such as alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, can increase the risk for some types of birth defects. Some substances in the workplace or home have also been linked to birth defects and poor pregnancy outcomes. If a woman is pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, avoiding these exposures before and during pregnancy can help increase her chances for a healthy baby. In the United States, nearly half of pregnancies are unplanned. If a woman gets pregnant unexpectedly, she might expose her developing baby to alcohol or other harmful substances before she realizes she is pregnant. This is because a woman can be pregnant and not know it for up to 6 weeks.



Key messages

- **Avoid alcohol:** There is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant. There is also no safe time during pregnancy to drink alcohol. All types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriages, stillbirths, and a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. These disabilities are known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs).
 - **What you can do:** The best advice for women is to stop drinking alcohol when trying to get pregnant. Contact your doctor, Alcoholics Anonymous, or local alcohol treatment center (findtreatment.samhsa.gov) if you need help to stop drinking.
- **Avoid smoking cigarettes:** Women who smoke during pregnancy place themselves and their unborn babies at risk for health problems, including premature birth, certain birth defects (like cleft lip and/or palate), and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
 - **What you can do:** Quitting smoking before getting pregnant is best. For a woman who is already pregnant, quitting as early as possible can still help protect against some health problems for the baby, such as low birth weight. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor or go to Smokefree.gov.
- **Avoid marijuana and street drugs:** A woman who uses marijuana or street drugs during pregnancy can have a baby who is born preterm, of low birth weight, or has other health problems, such as birth defects. Marijuana is the illicit drug most commonly used during pregnancy.
 - **What you can do:** Since we know of no safe level of marijuana use during pregnancy, women who are pregnant or considering becoming pregnant should not use marijuana, even in states where marijuana is legal. Women using marijuana for medical reasons should speak with their doctor about an alternative therapy with pregnancy-specific safety data.
- **Environmental and Workplace Exposures:** Some workplace hazards, such as exposure to fumes or toxic metals, can affect reproductive health, the ability to become pregnant, and the health of your unborn baby.
 - **What you can do:** Be careful about workplace exposures. Even if your job involves some hazards, there are things you can do to protect yourself and stay safe at work: ask questions about hazards in your workplace, protect yourself from exposure, talk to your doctor, learn how to avoid bringing hazards home, and request a health hazard evaluation.

Resources for Families/Women

CDC Alcohol Use in Pregnancy (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/alcohol-use.html)

This website discusses why alcohol use in pregnancy is dangerous and provides resources for help in stopping drinking.

Smokefree.gov (smokefree.gov/)

This website provides information and resources on quitting smoking.

Become an EX: For pregnant and postpartum smokers

(www.becomeanex.org/pregnant-smokers.php)

The American Legacy Foundation developed this EX program to help people quit smoking and to "re-learn life without cigarettes." It includes a section specifically for pregnant and postpartum smokers.

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) (www.nofas.org)

NOFAS offers multiple resources for people and families living with FASD including the Circle of Hope: a mentoring network for birth mothers, a resource directory as well as multiple fact sheets and materials with tips for parents, caregivers, and teachers.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): Reproductive health and the workplace

(www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro/)

This website provides information on workplace hazards that may pose a risk to male and female fertility, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and children's health. Information is provided to help employers, workers, and healthcare providers learn how they can keep job hazards from impacting reproductive health.

New Jersey Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets (web.doh.state.nj.us/rtkhsfs/indexfs.aspx)

This website provides workplace safety and health information in plain language, including information on reproductive health for over 1,600 workplace chemicals (many also in Spanish).

Resources for Healthcare Providers

FASD Toolkit for Pediatric Primary Care Clinicians (www.aap.org/fasd)

AAP's FASD Toolkit for pediatric primary care clinicians was developed to serve as the framework for the medical home management for children with FASDs. The toolkit provides tools and resources for primary care clinicians to equip them to better meet the special needs of these children and families.

Smoking Cessation for Pregnancy and Beyond: A Virtual Clinic

(<https://www.smokingcessationandpregnancy.org/>)

This website is an online training for healthcare professionals who will be assisting their female patients in quitting smoking, particularly those who are pregnant or in their child-bearing years. The program offers various learning tools, including interactive case simulations, mini-lectures, and interviews with real patients.

Additional resources, including condition-specific information, are available on the NBDPN website at www.nbdpn.org.

CHOOSE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

One of the best ways for women to prepare for healthy pregnancies and healthy babies is by adopting healthy habits before becoming pregnant. By adopting these habits, women are showing their love to their future babies and also to themselves. Even if a woman is not actively planning a pregnancy, getting healthy can help boost her health and her mood. Healthier women are less likely to have problems with pregnancy, such as gestational diabetes, miscarriage, or preterm labor. Likewise, their babies are less likely to have problems such as preterm birth, low birth weight, high birth weight, stillbirth, and birth defects. Getting healthier involves taking steps such as eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, and addressing chronic health conditions, such as diabetes.



Key messages

- **Control diabetes:** Poor control of diabetes during pregnancy increases the chance for birth defects and other problems for your baby. It can cause serious complications for you, too.
 - **What you can do:** If you have diabetes and want to get pregnant, it is important for you to get and keep your blood sugar in control (i.e. when your Hemoglobin A1c level is within the limits set by your healthcare provider). If you've never had a diabetes test and want to learn more about the symptoms, visit www.cdc.gov/diabetes/. If you think you might be at risk, talk to your doctor.
- **Reach and maintain a healthy weight:** Obesity increases a pregnant woman's risk that her baby will have a serious birth defect. Also, people who are overweight or obese have a higher risk for many serious conditions, including complications during pregnancy, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, gestational diabetes, and certain cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon).
 - **What you can do:**
 - **Eat a healthy diet:** Eat healthy foods that include a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
 - **Be physically active:** Get at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) per week of moderate aerobic activity, such as a brisk walk, before and during pregnancy.
- **Get mentally healthy:** Mental health is how we think, feel, and act as we cope with life. Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad, or stressed sometimes. However, if these feelings do not go away and they interfere with your daily life, get help. Untreated depression can increase the risk of pregnancy complications and postnatal depression, so it is important to seek help before and during pregnancy.
 - **What you can do:** If you are worried about the way you have been feeling, it is important to tell a doctor or nurse about your concerns. Many women feel this way... you are not alone. There are treatments to help you feel better. Talk to your doctor so you can feel like yourself again.
- **Prevent infections:** Some infections that a woman can get during pregnancy can be harmful to the developing baby and can even cause birth defects. Such infections can include sexually transmitted diseases like chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis; vaccine preventable diseases like rubella (also called German measles), pertussis (also called whooping cough), and the flu; infections caused by consuming

undercooked meat or unpasteurized foods like listeria; or other infections that you can get from forgetting to wash your hands.

- **What you can do:** Talk to your doctor about vaccinations. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Get tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as HIV and hepatitis B, and protect yourself from them. Cook your meat until it's well done and avoid unpasteurized foods.

Resources

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse: Pregnancy

(www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/pregnancy/) This website links to a number of resources and information on how to take care of yourself during pregnancy if you have diabetes.

Text4Baby (<https://www.text4baby.org/>)

Text4baby is a free cell phone text messaging service for pregnant women and new moms. Text messages are sent three times a week with information on how to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Sign up today.

CDC Physical Activity for Healthy, Pregnant and Postpartum Women

(www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/pregnancy.html) This CDC webpage explains physical activity guidelines and gives suggestions for healthy types of exercise for pregnant women.

Mayo Clinic Pregnancy and Exercise

(www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/pregnancy-week-by-week/in-depth/pregnancy-and-exercise/art-20046896) This website describes the importance of staying active during pregnancy and making sure to get approval of those activities from a healthcare provider. They suggest various types of physical activity and ways to stay motivated.

March of Dimes Eating and Nutrition During Pregnancy (www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/eating-healthy-during-pregnancy.aspx)

This website provides helpful information on how to eat healthy during pregnancy, including an example menu to help plan healthy meals as well easy-to-understand guidelines about different types of foods and serving sizes.

CDC Depression & Reproductive Health (www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Depression/Treatments.htm)

Learn the steps to seek help for depression. This website provides a checklist of questions to help you talk to your healthcare provider about these difficult issues. It also provides links to other resources for more information.

NIH Women and Depression: Discovering Hope

(www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/women-and-depression-discovering-hope/index.shtml)

This NIH website explains what depression is, signs and symptoms, causes, and potential treatment options. Links to where to go for help are also included.

Depression During & After Pregnancy: A Resource for Women, Their Families, & Friends

(www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond/depression/index.html)

This website begins to explain the possible causes for depressive feelings—and more importantly—how to find the help you need. A pdf booklet is available as a resource for more information and to let women know they are not alone.

Additional resources, including condition-specific information, are available on the NBDPN website at www.nbdpn.org.

TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Whether you are planning to become pregnant or not, talk to your healthcare provider about reproductive and preconception health care. Your doctor will want to discuss your personal and family health history and any medical conditions you currently have that could affect a pregnancy. He or she may make suggestions to improve your health. He or she also may discuss any previous pregnancy problems you may have had, medicines that you currently are taking, vaccinations that you might need, and steps you can take before pregnancy to prevent certain birth defects.

Key messages

- **Discuss all medications:** Taking certain medications before or during pregnancy might cause serious birth defects for your baby. While some medications are known to be harmful when taken during pregnancy, we don't know the safety or risk of most medications. The effects depend on many factors, such as how much medication is taken, when during the pregnancy the medication is taken, other health conditions a woman might have, or other medications a woman takes.
 - **What you can do:** Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about any medications you are taking or thinking about taking. These include prescription and over-the-counter medications, and dietary or herbal supplements. Talking to your doctor before making any serious medication changes is essential.
- **Talk about family history:** Collecting your family's health history can be important for your child's health. You might not realize that knowing about your sister's heart defect, your mother's miscarriage, or your cousin's sickle cell disease can give your doctor important information that may affect your pregnancy. Based on your family history, your doctor might alter your care or refer you for genetic or nutritional counseling.
 - **What you can do:** Learn about your family's health history, including their pregnancy and reproductive history. Complete one of the family history tools described below to help initiate a conversation with your doctor.



Resources for Women/Families

Mother to Baby: Medications & More During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding (www.mothersbaby.org)

MotherToBaby, a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists, is dedicated to providing evidence-based information to mothers, health care professionals, and the general public about medications and other exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

FDA Office of Women's Health Medications & Pregnancy

(<http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm223320.htm>)

This website compiles information on pregnancy registries, which monitor exposure to specific medications during pregnancy. The FDA Office of Women's Health has also developed helpful fact sheets about medications in pregnancy, which are available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). They've also developed a tool in English and Spanish to help you keep a record of the medicines you use.

My Family Health Portrait (<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/fhh-web/home.action>)

Using My Family Health Portrait you can record and print the health history for you and your family in order to share that information with your family members or your healthcare provider. You can also save your family health history so you can update it over time. Developed by the Surgeon General, these tools can help you talk with your healthcare provider about how your family's health may relate to your own.

Does it run in the family? (familyhealthhistory.org/)

A tool from the Genetic Alliance, *Does It Run In the Family?*, helps you create personalized booklets to start conversations about health in your family and community. The goal of the booklets is for individuals, families, and communities to use their new knowledge about family health history to become healthier and to increase their communication to others about health.

Genes in Life (www.genesinlife.org/)

Genes in Life is a place to learn about all the ways genetics play a role in your life. On this site you will learn how genetics affects you and your family, why you should talk to your healthcare providers about genetics, how to get involved in genetics research, and much more.

Resources for Healthcare Providers

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (www.acog.org)

The ACOG Web site offers information you can trust from the leading experts in women's health care resources including a [physician directory](#) and several patient-focused [fact sheets](#) with information on contraception, nutrition during pregnancy, and reducing your risk of birth defects.

CDC's Treating For Two (www.cdc.gov/treatingfortwo)

CDC's Treating for Two initiative focuses on better research and reliable guidance to help women and their healthcare providers make informed decisions about treating health conditions during pregnancy. This website discusses CDC's research and activities as well as what we know about medication use during pregnancy and what you should do regarding your medications if you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant.

Family History Tool for Pediatric Providers (www.geneticsinprimarycare.org/YourPractice/Family-Health-History/Pages/Family-History-Tool-for-Pediatric-Providers.aspx)

The Genetics in Primary Care Institute (GPCI) of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Coalition for Health Professional Education in Genetics (NCHPEG), March of Dimes, Genetic Alliance, Partners Healthcare, and Health Resources and Services Administration have developed an electronic pediatric family history tool. The tool aims to support the provider in family history risk assessment, genetic evaluation and identify additional evaluation, preventative services, or personalized management for children who are at increased risk for health conditions based on family health history.

Additional resources, including condition-specific information, are available on the NBDPN website at www.nbdpn.org.

SAMPLE PROCLAMATION

National Birth Defects Prevention Month, January 2016

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. While many unknown factors play a role in birth defects occurrence, steps can be taken to help prevent or limit certain risks for birth defects, such as exposure to chemicals in the home or at work, use of alcohol and recreational drugs, a lack of folic acid in a woman's diet, and lack of prenatal care. Therefore, let's make a **PACT** for prevention! **P**lan ahead, **A**void harmful substances, **C**hoose a healthy lifestyle, and **T**alk to your healthcare provider.

- Whereas, Every 4 ½ minutes, a U.S. baby is born with a birth defect. Birth defects are a leading cause of death in the first year of life, causing one in every five infant deaths. These conditions lead to \$2.6 billion per year in hospital costs alone in the United States. In *(name of your state)* birth defects account for about ### infant deaths every year; and
- Whereas, Birth defects can occur in any family regardless of race, ethnicity, health history, economic status, or level of education; and
- Whereas, About half of all pregnancies are unplanned, contributing to late entry into prenatal care and presenting a barrier to optimal pregnancy management, particularly during the crucial first weeks of a baby's development; and
- Whereas, Early identification of a child with a birth defect coupled with early intervention services typically improves the child's quality of life and may even save his or her life; and
- Whereas, Managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant can help increase a woman's chance of having a healthy baby. The National Birth Defects Prevention Network and CDC encourage parents-to-be to make a **PACT** for prevention to take steps to help reduce their risk for birth defects. These steps include:
- P**lanning ahead for pregnancy
 - A**voiding harmful substances
 - C**hoosing a healthy lifestyle
 - T**alking to a healthcare provider before and during pregnancy; and
- Whereas, The good health and well-being of the people of *(state name)* are enhanced by the support of a national effort to educate about preconception health and strategies to prevent birth defects; and
- Whereas, The *(name of your state Department of Health Services)* and the *(name of your state Birth Defects Monitoring Program)* join with the March of Dimes, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network, as well as many dedicated volunteers, healthcare professionals, and parent groups by participating in this promotion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, -----, Governor of the State of -----, do hereby proclaim January 2016 as
NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH.

DROP IN-ARTICLES

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month (52 words)

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. In the United States, a baby is born with a birth defect every 4 ½ minutes. All women can make a **PACT** for birth defects prevention by **P**lanning ahead, **A**voiding harmful substances, **C**hoosing a healthy lifestyle and **T**alking to your healthcare provider. Learn more: www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php.

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month (76 words)

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. Join the effort to raise awareness of birth defects, their causes and their impact. We encourage all women to make healthy choices to help increase their chances of having a healthy baby. Make a **PACT** for prevention by **P**lanning ahead, **A**voiding harmful substances, **C**hoosing a healthy lifestyle and **T**alking to your healthcare provider. Share your own tips for healthy pregnancy using #LivingMyPACT on social media. Learn more at www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php.

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month (159 words)

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. Every 4 ½ minutes a baby is born with a major birth defect in the United States. Become an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by joining the nationwide effort to raise awareness of birth defects, their causes and their impact.

We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all women to make healthy choices and adopt healthy habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect. This year we are encouraging all women to make a **PACT** for their own health and the family they may have one day.

Plan ahead

Avoid harmful substances

Choose a healthy lifestyle

Talk to your healthcare provider

Women and their loved ones can participate in a **PACT** and take these important steps toward a healthy pregnancy. Share your own tips for healthy pregnancy using #LivingMyPACT on social media. Learn more at www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php.

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month (291 words)

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. Every 4½ minutes, a baby is born with a major birth defect in the United States. Become an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by joining the nationwide effort to raise awareness of birth defects, their causes and their impact.

We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all women to make healthy choices and adopt healthy habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect. This year we are encouraging all women to make a **PACT** for their own health and the family they may have one day.

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

Women and their loved ones can participate in a **PACT** and take these important steps toward a healthy pregnancy. Share your own tips for healthy pregnancy using #LivingMyPACT on social media.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network, in collaboration with many state and local organizations, are working together to raise awareness of birth defects and encourage women to make a **PACT** for prevention. Learn more about the effect you can have on birth defects at www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

National Birth Defects Prevention Month: Make a PACT to Prevent Birth Defects (Long version)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 1, 2016

Contact: *(Name of person submitting release)*
(Phone here) – or – (Email here)

(Your City, Your State) – (Your organization) is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to invite women and their families to make a **PACT** for birth defects prevention. In recognition of January as *National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2016*, *(your organization)* is encouraging healthcare professionals, educators, social service professionals, and the general public to support this effort. Every 4 ½ minutes, a baby is born with a birth defect in the United States. We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But, we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant.

This year we are encouraging all women to make a **PACT** for their own health and the family they may have one day.

Plan Ahead
Avoid Harmful Substances
Choose a Healthy Lifestyle
Talk to Your Healthcare Provider

By making the **PACT**, women can reduce the risk of having a child with a birth defect and also reduce their risk of pregnancy complications, such as early pregnancy loss, prematurity and stillbirths.

About 120,000 babies are affected by birth defects each year in the United States, with around *(prevalence information for your state from your state's birth defects tracking system or other source)* cases occurring in *(name of your state)*. Not only can birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disability, they are also the most common cause of death in the first year of life and the second most common cause of death in children aged one to four years. Public awareness, expert medical care, accurate and early diagnosis, and social support systems are all essential for optimal prevention and treatment of these all-too-common and sometimes deadly conditions.

“Most people are unaware of how common, costly, and critical birth defects are in the United States, or that there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of birth defects,” says *(your contact)* of *(your organization)*.

“The health of women prior to pregnancy can affect the risk of having a child with a birth defect. Diet, lifestyle choices, factors in the environment, health conditions and medications before and during pregnancy all can play a role in preventing or increasing the risk of birth defects,” says *(your contact's last name)*.

“Small steps, like making healthy choices, visiting a healthcare provider well before pregnancy, controlling your weight through healthy diet and activity, and taking a multivitamin every day, can go a long way,” says *(your contact's last name)*. The NBDPN is working with healthcare professionals and public health agencies around the country to encourage prevention and awareness of birth defects among the over 60 million women of childbearing age in the United States and their partners. In addition to its efforts in prevention, the NBDPN works to improve nationwide tracking of birth defects and to advance research on

possible causes. It also offers support to families who are dealing with the realities of a child born with one of these conditions. Further information about the NBDPN can be found at www.NBDPN.org.

(Your organization) is participating in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by *(add two details about your local activities, e.g., distributing information to women and their health care providers across the state, participating in health fairs, offering presentations at local schools. etc.)*. “We are excited to be part of this national campaign. Through our efforts across the country, we plan to reach millions of women and their families with vital prevention information and an opportunity to make a **PACT** to prevent birth defects.” says *(your contact’s last name)*. We encourage you to be an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention. Share your own tips for healthy pregnancy using #LivingMyPACT on social media.

To learn more, please contact *(your organization)* at *(phone here)* or *(E-mail here)*. The 2016 NBDPN Birth Defects Prevention information packet, including *Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects: Make a PACT for Prevention* (as well as archives of past packets), is available online at: www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php. All materials can be printed, electronically conveyed, or added to websites for distribution as needed. Further information regarding NBDPN can be obtained at NBDPN.org or on Facebook by searching “National Birth Defects Prevention Network”.

DROP-IN E-ARTICLES TARGETING PEDIATRIC HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

National Birth Defects Prevention Month: Make a PACT to Prevent Birth Defects

Plan ahead to prevent birth defects (78 words)

Pediatric clinicians play an important role in fostering positive youth development. Risky behaviors can sometimes be a part of a teen's process of exploring and learning about life. Pediatricians can empower them to make healthy choices for their physical and mental well-being. January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Learn more about adolescent sexual risk behaviors and creating healthy opportunities for young adults so that they are prepared when the time comes for them to make reproductive choices.

Partner with your patients to avoid harmful substances (84 words)

During the month of January, National Birth Defects Prevention Month, pediatricians are called upon to increase their capacity to screen and intervene, if necessary, for adolescent alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other substance use. Not all substance use is an addiction but binge drinking and use of other harmful substances creates risk for injury, motor vehicle accidents and unprotected sex. Encouraging adolescent patients to adopt healthy behaviors early can help improve their own health and the health of the families they may have one day.

Choose a healthy lifestyle to prevent birth defects (68 words)

Healthy, active living begins with the family. Encourage families to lay the foundations early that will mitigate obesity, diabetes and other risk factors for birth defects. January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. It is never too early to begin living a healthy lifestyle. Learn what pediatricians and the medical home can do to support families and their efforts to achieve and maintain a healthy way of life.

Talk with your patients to prevent birth defects (74 words)

In January, National Birth Defects Prevention Month, pediatricians are called upon to partner with patients and families about their risk for birth defects, including possible genetic, mental health and substance use factors. Talk with your patients about their family health history and how that might influence their reproductive choices. Learn what you can do to talk with your patients about their mental health and motivate them to reduce potential risks related to substance use.

SAMPLE LETTER TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Dear Medical Professionals and Health Care Providers (or *individual's name*):

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month – 2016! The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) is offering a resource packet with up-to-date, targeted information for professionals, their patients, and interested members of the general public. (“I”, “We” OR YOUR ORGANIZATION’S NAME) urge you to take part in local and nationwide efforts to raise awareness of birth defects, their causes, and their impact, with the ultimate goal of reducing the occurrence of preventable birth defects and their secondary complications through evidence-based methods of prevention, early detection, and treatment.

NBDPN’s goal for 2016 is to continue the momentum from previous years, increasing awareness that birth defects are common, costly, and critical, and offering actionable steps that professionals, community groups, and the public can take to prevent birth defects. Together we are raising awareness that

- **Birth defects are common.** In fact, 1 baby is born with a birth defect every 4 ½ minutes. That translates into 1 in every 33 babies born each year in the United States.
- **Birth defects are costly.** In the U.S. each year, the total hospital costs of children with birth defects exceed \$2.6 billion.
- **Birth defects are critical.** About 20% of infant deaths are caused by birth defects annually in the United States as well as 6-15% of deaths in children up to age 14 years. Those that survive and live with birth defects are at increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive, and social challenges.

You are in a powerful position to affect birth defects in the United States. You can raise awareness and encourage patients to adopt healthy behaviors in order to lower their risk for certain birth defects. You can strive to detect birth defects that do occur as early as possible. You can act to prevent secondary complications. Ultimately, these efforts will reduce birth defect associated health care costs as well as personal, societal, and emotional costs, and lead to a healthier future for children and families.

This year we are encouraging medical professionals to work with their patients to make a **PACT** for their own health and the family they may have one day. Specially-designed materials to help you spread the word and engage with your patients are available on the NBDPN website. These resources will support your efforts to encourage patients to: **P**lan ahead; **A**void harmful substances; **C**hoose a healthy lifestyle; and **T**alk with their healthcare providers.

You have the power to make a difference. We urge you to join us as an active participant in *National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2016* and to continue your efforts throughout the year. You can access the packet (as well as archives of past packets) online at: www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php. If (I/we) can help you or your patients further, please feel free to let (me/us) know how.

Sincerely,
(Your own name if appropriate or your organization)

SAMPLE LETTER TO PEDIATRIC HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Dear (Pediatric Healthcare Provider):

You and your colleagues in pediatric healthcare can play an important role in the prevention of birth defects. As you regularly witness first-hand in your practice, birth defects can have far-reaching effects on the lives of children and their families. While many unknown factors play a role in birth defects occurrence, we know there are many well researched and simple steps that you can teach and encourage during routine adolescent care that can lead to the prevention of certain birth defects, as well as many common complications of pregnancy as your patients move into their child-bearing years.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have developed an educational resource targeted to young women and young men entitled, *Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects: Make a PACT for Prevention*. The elements of the PACT are **P**lan Ahead; **A**void Harmful Substances; **C**hoose a Healthy Lifestyle; and **T**alk to Your Doctor.

The best time to begin building personal health literacy regarding the prevention of birth defects is during the teen years. By making a PACT, teens can adopt healthy behaviors early to improve their own health and the health of the families they may have one day. These actions can also reduce teens' risk of having a child with birth defects or other potential pregnancy complications, such as early pregnancy loss, prematurity, and stillbirths.

The daily consumption of 400 mcg of folate (most commonly available as folic acid in a daily multiple vitamin and mineral supplement) by young women starting from the time of her first menstrual period, will reduce their risk of having children with neural tube defects by more than 70%. Folate can also reduce the risk of congenital heart defects, orofacial defects, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, infertility, pregnancy loss, and prematurity.

Understanding the role of harmful substances such as alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs and common toxins in the risk for birth defects not only during pregnancy but in the months leading up to pregnancy may help young women and men avoid these substances when they are sexually active.

Understanding that 50% of pregnancies are unplanned and understanding options available for preventing accidental pregnancies can help young women and men to avoid unwanted pregnancies and to plan ahead to maximize their chances of having healthy pregnancies when the time is right.

Viewing each sexually active teenage patient as a potential parent can help to assure that medications are prescribed with the possibility of subsequent pregnancy considered. Assuring that vaccinations are kept up-to-date throughout teen and adult years can also offer protection against some birth defects and pregnancy complications. Health knowledge and lifestyle habits acquired during adolescence will affect health and reproductive health decisions made throughout their lives. Pediatric healthcare providers play a key role in the lifelong prevention of birth defects. Please consider incorporating the PACT for Prevention resources into your daily practice.

You have the power to make a difference. We urge you to join us as an active participant in *National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2016* and to continue your efforts throughout the year. You can access the packet (as well as archives of past packets) online at: www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php. If (I/we) can help you or your patients further, please feel free contact (me/us) at any time.

Sincerely,
(Your own name if appropriate or your organization)

FACT SHEET FOR POLICY MAKERS

Birth Defects Tracking, Research & Prevention

Tracking where and when birth defects occur and who they affect is a first step in preventing them. States play a vital role in preventing birth defects by maintaining birth defects tracking programs.

Birth Defects: Common, Costly, and Critical

Common

1 in 33 babies

Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States. **[Insert state numbers]**

Costly

\$2.6 billion

Each year, total hospital costs for U.S. children and adults exceed \$2.6 billion.

Critical

1 in 5 deaths

Birth defects cause 1 in every 5 deaths among babies in their first year of life.

Real Families, Real Stories

Meet Ashley. She was born with gastroschisis, a birth defect which caused her intestines to be born on the outside of her body. The beginning of her life was filled with surgeries and tests, setbacks and worry. Her mother, Kayte, says, “Ashley has a resiliency that other kids her age don’t possess... Although her life was initially filled with challenges, Ashley is blossoming into a remarkable young girl who has inspired countless other families with her story.” Ashley represents 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States.



Importance of Birth Defects Tracking and Research

The value of birth defects tracking programs on clinical and public health research cannot be overstated. This work has revolutionized the way researchers, clinicians, and healthcare professionals approach, treat, and manage babies affected by birth defects. Tracking and research help us understand if the number of birth defects is increasing or decreasing over time, investigate possible causes, expand our understanding of preventive measures, and plan for health and education services for families of children with special needs. Identifying birth defects at a state level also strengthens public health officials’ ability to estimate prevalence and evaluate risk factors that are most important to their community.

<STATE> Birth Defects Tracking System

Since <YEAR>, the <BIRTH DEFECT TRACKING PROGRAM (BDTP)> has monitored the prevalence of birth defects in <STATE>. The <BDTP> is a statewide, population-based surveillance program with information on approximately <STATE SPECIFIC NUMBER> babies born with specific birth defects. The <BDTP> was established to identify and describe the patterns and trends of birth defects in <STATE>, provide education and outreach, investigate potential causes, and respond to community concerns about possible clusters of birth defects. Data has been collected on over <#####> children born in <STATE> with major structural birth defects. These data are essential for understanding the impact of birth defects in <STATE>.

PATERNAL CONTRIBUTION TO A DEVELOPING BABY'S HEALTH

Introduction

To help ensure a healthy pregnancy, preconception health is important for both parents. As you know, babies inherit one copy of each gene from their mother and one copy from their father. Genes contain the instructions that tell the cells of the body how to grow and work. Damage to the genes inherited from the mother's egg or the father's sperm can therefore affect a baby's development.

Damage to sperm through changes in the DNA code (called mutations) can come from things in the environment, such as exposure to radiation or exposure to certain chemicals. Other things, like a man's age, the food he eats or the medications he takes, can lead to changes not only in sequence of the genetic code, but also in how or when genetic information becomes available for cells to use. The structure of DNA and how available information is for cells to use is often referred to as the epigenome. Studies in laboratory animals and humans have shown that both kinds of changes, changes to the sequence of the genetic code as well as changes to the epigenome, can affect a baby's development.³ In addition, there is evidence that some of these changes can be transmitted across generations.³

Risk Factors

Studies have shown that some factors can increase the risk for damage to genetic information in a man's sperm and can therefore affect the developing baby. Some of these risk factors include:

- Cancer chemotherapy drugs¹
- Ionizing radiation exposure¹
- Cigarette smoking (also secondhand smoke)^{1,3}
- Air pollution¹
- Age: As men age, sperm can decrease in quality and may not repair damage as well as when men are younger in age. In particular, men over age 45 years are more at risk to these types of changes to the sperm.⁵
- Diet: As we know, getting enough folic acid daily is important for women for the prevention of major birth defects of a baby's brain and spine (neural tube defects). The same is true for men. Lack of folic acid in men has been shown to be linked with birth defects.⁴ In addition, folic acid can affect sperm's epigenome.²

What You Can Do

Preconception care offers an opportunity, similar to the opportunity it presents for women, for disease prevention and health promotion among men. In addition, preconception care for men is an important factor in improving family planning and pregnancy outcomes for women, enhancing the reproductive health and health behaviors of men and their partners, and preparing for fatherhood.

Encourage male patients to make a PACT for their own health and the family they may have one day.

Resources

1. Demarini DM. Declaring the existence of human germ-cell mutagens. *Environ Mol Mutagen*. 2012 Apr;53(3):166-72. doi: 10.1002/em.21685. Epub 2012 Feb 20. PubMed PMID: 22351488.
2. Lambrot R, Xu C, Saint-Phar S, Chountalos G, Cohen T, Paquet M, Suderman M, Hallett M and Kimmins S. Low paternal dietary folate alters the mouse sperm epigenome and is associated with negative pregnancy outcomes. *Nature communications* (2013) Published online Dec 2013. Doi: 10.1038/ncomms3889.
3. Laubenthal J1, Zlobinskaya O, Poterlowicz K, Baumgartner A, Gdula MR, Fthenou E, Keramarou M, Hepworth SJ, Kleinjans JC, van Schooten FJ, Brunborg G, Godschalk RW, Schmid TE, Anderson D. Cigarette smoke-induced transgenerational alterations in genome stability in cord blood of human F1 offspring. *FASEB J*. 2012 Oct;26(10):3946-56. doi: 10.1096/fj.11-201194. Epub 2012 Jun 22
4. Safi J, Joyeux L, and Chalouhi GE. Periconceptional folate deficiency and implications in Neural Tube Defects. *Journal of Pregnancy* (2012) Published online 2012 Aug 5. doi: [10.1155/2012/295083](https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/295083).
5. Sharma R, Agarwal A, Rohra WK, Assidi M, Abu-Elmagd M and Turki RF. Effects of increased paternal age on sperm quality, reproductive outcome and associated epigenetic risks to offspring. *Reproductive Biology and Endocrinology* (2015) 13:35.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL FOR MEN

Dads play an important part in a healthy pregnancy. Make a PACT for your own health and the family you may have one day.

When David thought about his future and the dad he wanted to be, he made a commitment to himself to provide for his family as best he could. He was excited to think about the day his daughter would take her first steps or the day he would teach his son to ride a bike or play catch outside. But as he talked with his healthcare provider, he was reminded that his commitment to his family starts even before his children are born. As a dad, he will contribute half of the biological building blocks for his children. Keeping himself healthy will help him pass along healthy genes and give his children their best chance at a healthy start.



Like David, you may be thinking about the family you may have one day. Here are some tips to help you prepare and get healthy.

PLAN AHEAD

Think about your goals for yourself—for school, your job or career, and for other important things in your life. Then, think about how having children fits in with these goals. When you are ready, plan pregnancy with your partner. Whether you are trying to have a baby, or are just thinking about it sometime in the near or distant future, it is never too early to get healthy and prepare for fatherhood.

AVOID HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

Smoking, using “street” drugs, and binge drinking is harmful to your health. Protect your partner by quitting smoking. Remember, a pregnant woman who is exposed to secondhand smoke has 20% higher chance of giving birth to a baby with low birth weight than pregnant women who are not exposed to secondhand smoke. In addition, drinking too much alcohol and using “street” drugs can lead to infertility among men. Avoid harmful workplace exposures if you can. Even if your job involves some hazards, there are things you can do to protect yourself and stay safe at work: ask questions about hazards in your workplace, protect yourself from exposure, learn how to avoid bringing hazards home, and request a health hazard evaluation.

CHOOSE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

People who are overweight or obese have a higher risk for many serious conditions, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. In addition, obesity among men is associated directly with increasing male infertility. The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight isn't about short-term dietary changes. It's about a lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity. Staying in control of your weight contributes to good health now and as you age. If you are underweight, overweight, or obese, talk with your doctor or another health professional about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

TALK WITH A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Sometimes a man is born with problems that affect his sperm. Other times, problems start later in life due to illness or injury. A man's sperm can be changed by his overall health and lifestyle. For example, chemotherapy drugs used to treat cancer can reduce the health or number of your sperm. If you are concerned about fertility, talk with your doctor or another health professional.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

2016 PACT THEME POSTER (FLYER IN ENGLISH/SPANISH)

These resources can be downloaded from www.nbdpn.org

Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects
Make a **PACT** for Prevention

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, and lean proteins.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your doctor

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family history.

Making a PACT to get healthy before and during pregnancy can help you have a healthy baby.

For more information, go to
<http://www.cdc.gov/nbddd/birthdefects/prevention.html> and
<http://www.cdc.gov/preconception/chooseyourlife/>

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES TO HELP PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

Make a PACT for Prevention

PLAN AHEAD

-  Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant
-  Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day



AVOID HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

-  Avoid smoking
-  Avoid drinking alcohol
-  Be careful with harmful exposures at work and home



CHOOSE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

-  Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, and lean proteins
-  Be physically active
-  Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control



TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

-  Get a medical checkup
-  Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter
-  Talk about your family history



Making a PACT to get healthy before and during pregnancy can help you have a healthy baby.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

For more information, please visit
www.cdc.gov/nccd/d/birthdefects/prevention.html
and www.cdc.gov/preconception/showyoulove

CDC/OD/16-001

OTHER POSTERS (FLYERS IN ENGLISH/SPANISH)

- One in every 33 babies is born with a birth defect.
- Every 4 ½ minutes, a baby is born with a birth defect.
- Birth defects affect us all. What effect will you have on birth defects?



APPENDIX 1: SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

Birth Defects Prevention Month Social Media Toolkit

Join the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) this January to promote National Birth Defects Prevention Month using your social media networks. Use this toolkit to raise awareness about #1in33 and join the conversation about birth defects prevention using #LivingMyPACT. In this appendix, we have provided suggestions for using various social media platforms to promote National Birth Defects Prevention Month, including example posts and more!



Facebook

- Like [National Birth Defects Prevention Network's](#) page on Facebook. Like, share and comment.
- Tag [National Birth Defects Prevention Network](#) on your own posts.
- Share the PACT badge (right), CDC social media buttons, or change your profile photo!
- For organizations or institutions, post this sample message to encourage your patients to raise awareness: How are you making healthy choices for healthy pregnancy? Share your tips with us! #LivingMyPACT
- Post some of the sample posts below:
 1. Make a PACT to get healthy before and during pregnancy. All pregnant women and those who may become pregnant should Plan ahead, Avoid harmful substances, Choose a healthy lifestyle, and Talk to a healthcare provider. For more information visit: <http://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php> #LivingMyPact #1in33
 2. January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Did you know that birth defects affect 1 in 33 babies born in the United States? Make a PACT for prevention: <http://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2016.php> #LivingMyPact #1in33

Twitter

- Follow [@NBDPN](#) and [@CDC_NCBDDD](#) on Twitter. Retweet, favorite, and comment.
- Use the #LivingMyPACT or #1in33 hashtags when sharing information, resources, photos or your own experiences.
- For organizations or institutions, post these sample messages to encourage your patients to raise awareness:
 - This January, make a PACT for birth defects prevention. Tell us how you are making healthy choices using #LivingMyPACT.
 - As you ring in the New Year, let 2016 be the year you commit to healthy habits. Make a PACT for birth defects prevention. #LivingMyPACT
- Share some of the sample tweets below:
 - January is Nat'l Birth Defects Prevention Month. Major birth defects affect #1in33 US babies. Learn more: <http://go.usa.gov/gH8T>
 - Getting your body ready for pregnancy—called preconception health—can help reduce the risk of birth defects. <http://go.usa.gov/g6jx> #1in33

Instagram

- Follow @CDC
- Post photos of how you are living your PACT. Ideas include photos of healthy eating, exercise, drinking water, or taking vitamins. Incorporate the hashtag #LivingMyPact.
- Share your own #1in33 story of how birth defects affect you. Tag photos with #1in33.
- For organizations or institutions, encourage your patients to raise awareness by posting: Show us how you are living your PACT for prevention. #LivingMyPact

Examples of #LivingMyPACT Posts

 <p>Finished our 5K! Show us how you are #LivingMyPACT. #1in33</p>	 <p>I'm #LivingMyPACT by teaching my children to live a healthy lifestyle. #1in33 that's me.</p>	 <p>My reason for #LivingMyPACT.</p>	 <p>I am #LivingMyPACT by taking a multivitamin with folic acid every day. #1in33</p>
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Sample Graphics

Share these graphics or replace your profile or cover photos with them. These samples and more are available on nbdpn.org

Birth defects affect us all.



What effect will YOU have on birth defects?

Learn more about birth defects. Visit www.cdc.gov/birthdefects. 

Plan ahead.



MAKE A PACT FOR PREVENTION #1in33

Talk to your doctor. Plan ahead. Avoid harmful substances. Choose a healthy lifestyle.

January is Birth Defects Prevention Month | www.nbdpn.org



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Plan ahead.



MAKE A PACT FOR PREVENTION #1in33

Talk to your doctor. Plan ahead. Avoid harmful substances. Choose a healthy lifestyle.

January is Birth Defects Prevention Month | www.nbdpn.org

APPENDIX 2: MATERIALS ADAPTED FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Local Public Health Resource Packet

This appendix contains some of the materials from the 2016 National Birth Defects Prevention Month packet that have been adapted for use in raising birth defects awareness with local public health agencies. These materials supplement a more [comprehensive packet](#) that includes a sample news release, proclamation, provider letters, resources on the internet, and parent resources.

Local public health resource packet includes examples of:

- LPH1: Local public health announcement
- LPH2: Traditional letter to local public health agency administrators
- LPH3: Electronic letter to local public health agency staff
- LPH4: Brief awareness article
- LPH5: Awareness article for public health clinic newsletters
- LPH6: Announcement for electronic newsletters or listservs

LPH1: Sample local public health announcement “Plan Ahead”

Plan ahead for January 2016 – Birth Defects Prevention Month!

The theme for 2016 is “Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects – Make a **PACT** for Prevention.” **P**lan ahead, **A**void harmful substances, **C**hoose a healthy lifestyle, and **T**alk to your doctor. We encourage you to begin thinking about activities you can do in your agency or community to raise public awareness of birth defects. The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) has developed a valuable packet of information. The materials raise awareness among health and public health professionals as well as the general public and include posters, sample communication tools and resource sheets. Some ideas for use of the packet to raise awareness include:

- Put posters up in your agency waiting rooms, even restrooms!
- Provide fact sheets and posters on the importance of using folic acid to prevent certain types of serious birth defects.
- Volunteer to present information on birth defects and birth defects prevention at a “lunch and learn” with your Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Home Visiting Nurses and other agency staff.
- Supply pamphlets or fact sheets for patients and professionals in doctors’ offices and clinics in the community.

Electronic materials will be sent as soon as they are ready. Please contact (*insert contact information*) if you would like more information.

LPH2: Sample traditional letter to local public health agency administrators

January 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Administrators, County Health Departments
District Nurse Managers (*Insert Other Recipients*)

FROM: (*Insert Name*)
(*Department Director*)

About 120,000 babies are affected by birth defects each year in the United States. In (*name of state*), approximately (*insert number*) babies are born with a birth defect each year. Not only can birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disability, they are also the most common cause of death in infants and the second most common cause of death in children aged one to four years. I have included a State of (*name of state*) Birth Defects Profile (*if appropriate - as well as a Regional Birth Defects Profile*) for your reference.

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. The theme for 2016 is “Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects – Make a **FACT** for Prevention.” We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But, we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before and during pregnancy. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to:

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as possible before becoming pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and at home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

You can make a difference in the lives of (*name of state*) families. Please review the materials in the attached packet and use them to raise public awareness of birth defects. We invite you to share these resources with coworkers, colleagues, staff, and others who might benefit from this information.

Thank you for your support. If you have any questions or would like additional materials, please contact me or (*Insert Name*) by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email (*Insert Email*) or (*Insert Email*).

LPH3: Sample electronic letter to local public health agency staff

Dear *(public health nurses/practitioners/clinic staff/etc.)*,

The *(name of state health department – hyperlinked to website)* is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. The theme for 2016 is “Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects – Make a **FACT** for Prevention.” We hope that you will join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month and raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your communities. Governor *(name of Governor)* has also proclaimed the month of January 2016 as Birth Defects Prevention Month ([hyperlink to state proclamation](#)). I invite you to share the attached resources with coworkers, colleagues, local public health staff, and others who might benefit from this information.

Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States and are a leading cause of infant mortality. Babies who survive and live with birth defects are at an increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive, and social challenges. Medical care and support services only scrape the surface of the financial and emotional impact of living with birth defects.

We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But, we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to:

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and at home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

The *(name of state – hyperlink to birth defects program website)* Birth Defects Program website contains information, resources, and links to free educational materials from *(name of state health department)*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN). We encourage you to use these materials to raise awareness of the ways birth defects can be prevented among health professionals and the general public in your community. You have the power to make a difference. We urge you to join us as an active participant in *National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2016* and to continue your efforts throughout the year.

LPH4: Sample awareness article (brief)

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

“Make a PACT for prevention.”

Plan ahead, Avoid harmful substances, Choose a healthy lifestyle, Talk to your healthcare provider.

The *(name of state/local)* Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) and the *(name of state)* March of Dimes to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. Join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States and are a leading cause of infant mortality. Babies who survive and live with birth defects are at an increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive, and social challenges.

Although not all birth defects can be prevented, all women who could become pregnant or are pregnant can lower their risk of having babies with birth defects by following some basic health guidelines throughout their reproductive years. These include:

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and at home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

January is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

The *(name of state Birth Defects Program)* has resource materials available on their website to assist you in raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your clinic and communities. Materials include the NBDPN resource packet that can be tailored to meet your specific needs, sample partner and provider letters, a proclamation of the month, as well as links to resources for parents and other interested in learning more about birth defects.

For more information, contact *(insert name and email)*

LPH5: Sample awareness article for public health clinic newsletters

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

The (*name of state*) Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that can reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. This year's theme is "Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects: Make a **PACT** for Prevention." Although not all birth defects can be prevented, the healthcare community can help all women, including teens, who could become pregnant or are pregnant to lower their risk of having babies with birth defects by encouraging them to follow some basic health guidelines throughout their reproductive years:

Plan ahead

- Get as healthy as you can before you get pregnant.
- Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Avoid harmful substances

- Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Be careful with harmful exposures at work and at home.

Choose a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats and oils.
- Be physically active.
- Work to get medical conditions like diabetes under control.

Talk to your healthcare provider

- Get a medical checkup.
- Discuss all medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Talk about your family medical history.

January is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

You can make a difference in the lives of (*name of state*) families. Additional resources can be found on the NBDPN website. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact (*name and email*).

LPH6: Sample announcement for electronic newsletters or listservs

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month and January 10-16 is Folic Acid Awareness Week

The *(name of state)* Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. We hope that you will join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month! This year's theme is "Making Healthy Choices to Prevent Birth Defects: Make a **FACT** for Prevention." We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all women to make healthy choices and adopt healthy habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to **P**lan ahead, **A**void harmful substances, **C**hoose a healthy lifestyle, and **T**alk to their healthcare provider.

The *(name of state and birth defects program - hyperlink to birth defects program website)* has resource materials available on their website to assist you in raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your clinic and communities. Materials include the NBDPN resource packet and *(name of state)* resource packet that can be tailored to meet your specific needs. These materials contain sample partner and provider letters, a proclamation of the month, as well as links to resources for parents and other interested in learning more about birth defects. Free educational materials are also available on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/freematerials.html.

Folic Acid Awareness Week, January 10-16, is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that *all* women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly. To learn more about Folic Acid Awareness Week go to www.nbdpn.org/folicacidawareness.php.

For more information, contact *(name and email)*.

Please see the complete packet for additional resources at www.nbdpn.org:

- **Sample News Release**
- **Sample Proclamation**
- **Sample Provider letters**
- **Resources**