

January 9, 2020

BEST FOR YOU, BEST FOR YOUR BABY DURING NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH



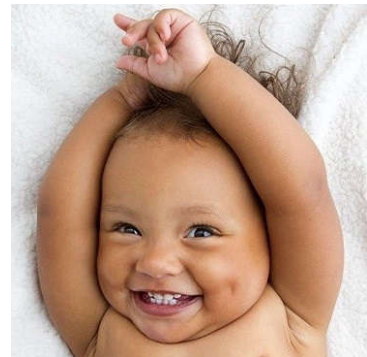
Contact:

Tom Iovino, Public Information Officer

thomas.iovino@flhealth.gov

(727) 568-8160 (media only)

It may seem difficult to believe, but even in 2020, a child is born with a birth defect every four and a half minutes in the United States. That's why during National Birth Defects Prevention Month, the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County is joining with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the March of Dimes and the American Academy of Pediatrics to raise awareness about five simple steps mothers-to-be can take to reduce the likelihood of their babies being born with a birth defect.



- Take 400 micrograms of folic acid each day. This nutrient has been shown to prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. Many birth defects develop early in the pregnancy, so the sooner you begin folic acid, the better.
- Consult with a healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medication. There are often benefits of continuing treatment throughout pregnancy. Discussing a treatment plan before a pregnancy allows a woman and her healthcare provider to weigh the pros and cons of all options to keep mom and baby as healthy as possible.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu. Having the right vaccinations at the right time during pregnancy can help keep a mom and her baby healthy.
- Reach a healthy weight before becoming pregnant. Obesity increases the risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications.
- Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances before and during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Avoid secondhand exposure to harmful substances as well.

DOH-Pinellas has resources to help moms and babies thrive:

- **WIC:** The supplemental nutrition program offers healthy foods for moms-to-be and continues providing them until the child turns five. A pregnant woman is considered two members of a household in its income limits. Peer counselors can help moms master breastfeeding for healthier babies. For information or to check if you qualify, go to

<http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/wic/index.html>.

- **Healthy Start:** Babies should not be born too small or too early. This maternal and child health program offers screenings and early preventive care to reduce infant mortality. For information, go to <http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/maternal-child-health/healthy-start/index.html>.
- **Healthy Families:** The program offers enhanced services provided by specialty staff including nurses, mental health counselors, father services specialists, and resource specialists as part of the team. Fathers are encouraged to participate too! The program uses the “Growing Great Kids” curriculum which is an interactive fun way to provide activities for the parents with their child(ren).
- **Nurse-Family Partnership:** A home visiting-based program intended to promote well-being of first-time, low-income mothers and their children. Nurses provide parenting education, referrals to community resources, and promote family enrichment beginning in pregnancy prior to 28 weeks’ gestation through the child’s second birthday.

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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.

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