

Birth Defects Prevention, Monitoring & Follow-up

Michigan's Birth Defects Program includes three important components:

Prevention

Includes identifying ways to prevent certain birth defects and educating communities and health professionals about prevention strategies. Up to 70% of neural tube defects (NTD) such as spina bifida can be prevented by adequate folic acid intake during the first month of pregnancy. Other birth defects that can be prevented are caused by certain maternal illnesses, infections, or exposures such as alcohol. MDCH collaborates with many partners to address prevention, including the March of Dimes, reproductive genetic centers, and

the National Birth Defects Prevention Network. Key activities include:

- A folic acid educational campaign
- Promoting prevention strategies during national Birth Defects Prevention Month
- Disseminating informational materials including a free pamphlet, *Preventing Birth Defects—Important Information for Michigan Families*
- Conducting outreach to special populations and high risk groups

- **For information on folic acid or birth defects prevention, contact Nelda Mercer, MS, RD, at (517) 335-8887 or mercern5@michigan.gov**

Monitoring

Is provided by the Michigan Birth Defects Registry (MBDR), established in 1992 by state law to track the occurrence of over 800 types of birth defects across the state. The confidential registry is a passive system that relies on reports submitted by hospitals and cytogenetic laboratories within 30 days of a child's diagnosis. Reportable conditions include structural malformations as well as genetic disorders and other selected diseases occurring in

children from birth through 24 months of age. About 10,000 Michigan children are born each year with birth defects or other reportable conditions. The MBDR currently contains 286,000 reports on approximately 143,000 children. An epidemiologist analyzes registry data and conducts special studies to better understand the impact of birth defects on public health.

- **To find statistical birth defect data summaries, visit www.mdch.state.mi.us/pha/osr/. To request data by specific geographic region or other demographic parameters, contact Glenn Copeland at (517) 335-8677 or copelandg@michigan.gov**

Follow-up

Includes identifying the special needs of children with birth defects, and making sure families are connected with available resources and support systems. Providing information to families in a timely manner while preserving the privacy of birth defects data is a top priority. A study has been conducted in selected Michigan hospitals to help identify the most useful and sensitive approach to

providing follow-up based on gaps in existing referral systems. The program maintains a genetic support group directory and distributes a pamphlet, *Resources for Families of Infants and Toddlers with Special Health Needs* at no cost to hospitals, health professionals and families. Follow-up on infants with neural tube defects began in 2004 and a parent handbook is under development.

- **To find information on services for children with birth defects, contact Jane Simmermon, RN, MPH, toll-free at 1-866-852-1247 or (517) 335-8887; or e-mail BDRFollowup@michigan.gov**