



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH  
LANSING

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GOVERNOR

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Dear Health Care Professional:

As you likely know, birth defects are a leading cause of infant and childhood mortality. These conditions place a considerable physical, emotional and economic burden on individuals, families, and society-at-large. In Michigan, more than 7,000 babies are born with a birth defect each year, per reporting to the Michigan Birth Defects Registry ([MBDR](#)). Nationwide, 3-4% of newborns are affected annually. To increase public awareness of the prevalence of birth defects and prevention strategies, we hope you will join us in promotion of National Birth Defects Prevention Month - January 2013. This year's focus is on raising general awareness of the fact that- *"Every 4 ½ minutes a baby is born with a birth defect"*.

In the United States, birth defects account for 20% of infant deaths and 6 to 15% of deaths in children up to 14 years of age [1,2]. There are a great variety of birth defects with congenital heart disease, orofacial clefts and Down syndrome being among the most common. Congenital heart defects are the most frequent, with a prevalence of about 1 in 100 births, and are a leading cause of infant mortality [3-5]. Congenital cardiac and circulatory anomalies account for about one in three birth-defect related hospital stays and account for \$1.4 billion of the \$2.6 billion in annual hospital expenses attributed to birth defects [6]. Around 20-30% of people with congenital heart defects have other complications including developmental or cognitive disorders or physical problems [7-9]. The medical costs (in-hospital, outpatient, and prescription drug expenses) for a child with an orofacial cleft are 500% to 800% higher than those for a non-affected child [10]. The estimated overall lifetime expenses related to Down syndrome range from \$180,000 to \$880,000 (in 2013-adjusted-dollars) [11]. None of these numbers consider the loss of income and productivity, or the day-to-day emotional and physical stresses that affect both the patient and the primary caregivers.

The cause of only about 30% of birth defects is known [12]. While no known etiology is identified for most birth defects, research continues to add to our understanding of their causes. Many general preventive measures have been identified. Raising awareness and universal utilization of these measures, both among the public and the healthcare community, can help to significantly reduce the occurrence of birth defects. Maternal obesity, diabetes, lack of adequate folic acid/folate intake, smoking, alcohol consumption, infections, and many legal and illegal drugs have been clearly identified as causal factors [13-19].

The healthcare community can help all women (including teens) who are pregnant or could become pregnant to lower their risk of having a baby with a birth defect by encouraging them to follow some basic health guidelines throughout their reproductive years, including:

- Take 400mcg of folic acid *daily* from the beginning of menstruation through menopause.
- Eat a healthy diet and aim for a healthy weight.
- Get a medical checkup before pregnancy and address specific health issues including family medical history, weight control, control of diabetes, and any medications taken.
- Stop smoking and avoid second-hand smoke.

- Stop drinking alcohol prior to pregnancy or as soon in pregnancy as possible.
- Plan carefully. Use contraception if taking medications that increase the risk for birth defects.

You can make a difference in the lives of Michigan families. This January, the MDCH Birth Defects Program, joins the National Birth Defects Prevention Network to encourage you to review this information and reach out to your patients. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact the Michigan Department of Community Health at 1-866-852-1247 or visit the Michigan Genetics Resource Connection at [www.migr.org](http://www.migr.org) and National Birth Defects Prevention Network at [www.nbdpn.org](http://www.nbdpn.org).

Sincerely,



Joan Ehrhardt,  
Birth Defects Prevention Program Coordinator

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