



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH
LANSING

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Dear Health Care Professional:

In January, Michigan recognizes the National Birth Defects Prevention Month. As you may know, birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, and the costs, both monetary and non-monetary, to individuals, families, communities and the health care industry are substantial. In Michigan, approximately 10,000 babies are born with a birth defect each year and nationally, 120,000 babies are affected annually.

Childbearing is a common experience among women in the United States and approximately 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned. Therefore, improving the health of women in their reproductive years *before they become pregnant* continues to be an important strategy to reduce all adverse pregnancy outcomes. In 2006, therefore, the CDC published recommendations to improve preconception health and health care in the United States. Prevention efforts do offer hope for reducing the number of children born with a birth defect in Michigan. The following prevention strategies can easily be incorporated into your practice:

- **Provide folic acid education as a standard of care.** The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day to prevent up to 70 percent of neural tube defects in the U.S.
- **Counsel women about the importance** of diet, weight and fitness.
- **Educate patients about risks** for diabetes, glycemic control and pregnancy outcomes.
- **Counsel women about the importance** of compliance with treatment for chronic conditions, and genetic counseling, when indicated.
- **Identify and help** victims of domestic violence/abuse.
- **Educate women and their partners** that during pregnancy, no level of alcohol or tobacco ingestion is safe for the developing fetus and cessation *before pregnancy* is recommended.

You can make a difference in the lives of Michigan's families and communities. The Michigan Department of Community Health and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network hope that you will take the time to review this information and make an effort to convey the prevention message to your patients.

If you have questions or would like more information, please call Joan Ehrhardt, Birth Defects Program Coordinator at 1-866-852-1247 or contact the Birth Defects Program via e-mail at BDRFollowup@michigan.gov. More resources and information can be found at the Michigan Genetics Resource Center, visit www.MIGeneticsConnection.org or visit the National Birth Defects Prevention Network at www.nbdpn.org.

Sincerely,

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