



## MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Your public health team, connecting with our communities to achieve healthier outcomes

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### **Help prevent birth defects by taking these steps**

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Every expectant mother hopes for a healthy baby, but sadly every four and a half minutes a baby is born with a major birth defect in the United States. These birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disabilities, and are the most common cause of death in the first year of life and the second-most common cause of death in children ages one to four years.

This uncertainty can be very unsettling, but the Mid-Michigan District Health Department would like to reassure women that they are not powerless when it comes to protecting their unborn child. While not all birth defects can be prevented, there are many things a woman can do to increase her chances of having a healthy baby.

One of the most important things a woman can do to reduce the risk of her baby being born with a birth defect is to prevent infections. This can be achieved by getting vaccinated, preventing insect bites, practicing good hygiene, and talking to her doctor.

#### **Get vaccinated**

The flu and whooping cough can cause serious illness in pregnant women and their developing babies, so be sure to get vaccinated and ask your doctor what other vaccinations may be needed.

#### **Prevent insect bites**

Mosquitos and ticks can carry harmful infections, so pregnant women should take steps to avoid being bitten.

Prevent insect bites by using repellent and wearing light colored, long-sleeved shirts and long pants when going outside. Keep in mind that mosquitos are most active at dusk and dawn while ticks are active at all times of the day, typically in warmer months.

Pregnant women should also avoid traveling to areas where the Zika virus is present. Partners of pregnant women who are planning to travel to areas with Zika virus should be aware of the risks and take preventative steps. For more information on Zika virus, visit [www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/zika).

#### **Practice good hygiene**

Washing your hands often with soap and water is an easy way to prevent infections. Be sure to wash your hands after using the bathroom; after changing diapers; after being around or touching pets or other animals; after handling raw meat, raw eggs, or unwashed vegetables; and before and after preparing or eating foods.

-more-

## 2- Birth defects

### **Talk to your healthcare provider**

Whether you are currently planning a pregnancy or not, talk to your doctor about preconception and reproductive health care. Ask your doctor how you can prevent infections, like influenza, Zika and sexually transmitted diseases before and after pregnancy.

In addition, all women should take the following steps to get ready for and have a healthy pregnancy:

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Be physically active
- Take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day, which helps a baby's brain and spine develop in the first month of pregnancy when a woman might not even know she is pregnant.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs
- Make sure medical conditions, like diabetes, are under control
- Know your family history
- See if you qualify for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program by calling 1-800-26-BIRTH. This program provides nutrition education, breastfeeding support, supplemental foods and health care referrals to qualified women, infants and children up to age five.

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.*

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