



## MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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

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### Steps to help prevent birth defects

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns MI- 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 aged 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 all women of childbearing age should do is take a vitamin with folic acid every day. Folic acid helps a baby's brain and spine develop in the first month of pregnancy when a woman might not even know she is pregnant.

Women should also take steps to prevent infections before and during pregnancy. Steps include:

- See your doctor regularly: Find out what vaccinations you need and how you can keep yourself and your unborn baby healthy.
- Maintain good hygiene: Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers or wiping runny noses; after being around or touching pets or other animals; after handling raw meat, raw eggs, or unwashed vegetables; or before preparing or eating foods.
- Properly prepare food: Wash your hands before and after preparing food and avoid unpasteurized milk and cheese.
- Protect yourself from animals and insects known to carry disease: Stay away from wild or pet rodents, live poultry, lizards and turtles, and do not clean cat litter boxes while pregnant. Use insect repellent to repel mosquitoes and ticks.

Additional ways women can get ready for and have a healthy pregnancy include avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs; making sure medical conditions, like diabetes, are under control; knowing your family history; and eating a healthy, balanced diet.

Additionally, women should see if they 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.

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## 2- Steps to help prevent birth defects

By following these guidelines, women can reduce the risk of prematurity, early pregnancy loss, stillbirths and having a child born with a birth defect.

For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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

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