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Pregnant women urged to ‘Prevent to Protect’ against Birth Defects *January is Birth Defects Awareness Month in Michigan*

LANSING, Mich. – To increase their chances of having a healthy baby, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is urging women to take steps to reduce their risk of getting an infection during pregnancy.

Gov. Rick Snyder has proclaimed January as Birth Defects Awareness Month in Michigan, and MDHHS is joining with the National Birth Defects Prevention Network, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the March of Dimes, the Teratology Society and MotherToBaby to raise awareness of birth defects and how they can be prevented.

The campaign, “Prevent to Protect: Prevent Infections for Baby’s Protection,” places a special emphasis on the importance of preventing infections before and during pregnancy that can increase the risk of having a baby with a birth defect. Birth defects 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.

Among the many steps a woman can take to increase her chance of having a healthy baby is preventing infections that increase the risk of birth defects and other health problems for mothers and babies. Some helpful tips for pregnant women or women who may become pregnant include:

Get vaccinated.

- Get the flu shot and the whooping cough vaccine.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines before getting pregnant.

Prevent insect bites.

- Use insect repellent.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
- Consider avoiding travel to areas with Zika virus.

Practice good hygiene.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid putting a young child’s cup or pacifier in your mouth.

Talk to your healthcare provider.

- Ask about how you can prevent infections, such as Zika virus.
- Discuss how to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

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“Every expectant mother should take steps to prevent an increased risk of birth defects as well as promote an overall healthy pregnancy and healthy baby,” said Eden Wells, MDHHS chief medical executive. “Vaccination, proper hygiene, prevention of insect bites, as well as conversations with your healthcare provider are important steps for any woman looking to start a family.”

Wells reminds all women capable of becoming pregnant that they should eat a healthy diet, be physically active and take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day, whether they are currently planning a pregnancy or not.

In the United States, a baby is born with a birth defect every 4½ minutes - about 120,000 babies each year. About 1 in 33 of Michigan’s 113,000 babies is born with a serious birth defect every year.

MDHHS encourages residents to be an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Learn more by following the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services on [Facebook](#) and **#Prevent2Protect** on Twitter.

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