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TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS DURING BIRTH DEFECT PREVENTION MONTH

MORGANTOWN, WV — (JANUARY 16, 2018)

Each year, about 1,500 babies are born in the United States with spina bifida, a neural tube defect that often results in damage to the spinal cord and nerves. At the same time, about 2,650 babies are born with a cleft palate and 4,440 are born with a cleft lip with or without a cleft palate.

And about two to 12 babies per every 10,000 live births are born with microcephaly, a condition in which the baby’s head and brain are smaller than normal.

Counselors at the Monongalia County Health Department’s Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program want to educate women on taking measures that can help prevent these and other birth defects, including by taking 400 micrograms of folic acid daily at least a month before becoming pregnant and then daily throughout the pregnancy.

January is National Birth Defect Prevention Month, an ideal time to highlight ways women can experience a healthier pregnancy. These include:

- See your health care provider regularly and start prenatal care as soon as you think you might be pregnant.
- Don’t drink alcohol, smoke or use non-prescription drugs, including illegal drugs.
- Talk to a health care provider about any medications you are taking or thinking about taking.
- If possible, be sure any medical conditions are under control before becoming pregnant. Some conditions that increase the risk for birth defects including diabetes and obesity.
- Learn how to prevent infections during pregnancy.
The emergence of Zika virus has added another infection that pregnant women need to avoid. Zika virus infection during pregnancy can cause microcephaly. If you are pregnant, do not travel to areas with Zika. If you must travel to an area with Zika, talk to your doctor or health care provider and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during the trip.

Other ways to prevent infection during pregnancy include washing your hands often, including after using the bathroom or handling pets, before eating and when you are around children. Do not touch or change kitty litter. Avoid unpasteurized, or raw, milk and any products made from it. Stay away from wild or pet rodents and their droppings. Get tested for sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B, and protect yourself from them.

Also, talk to your health care provider about vaccinations. It is recommended by the National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC) that women get the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine before getting pregnant, and a flu vaccine as well as a Tdap vaccine—that protects against whooping cough—during pregnancy.

Finally, ask your doctor about group B strep. About one in four women carry these bacteria but don’t have symptoms. A swab test near the end of pregnancy will detect it, and women who do have it should talk to their doctors about how to deliver the baby safely.

MCHD’s WIC program can help pregnant and breastfeeding women with children up to age 5 with nutrition counseling, breastfeeding support, health screenings, medical and social service referrals and food packages.

The Monongalia County Health Department WIC Program serves Doddridge, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, Preston and Taylor Counties. The income guidelines to qualify for WIC for 2017-2018 are:

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<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</th>
<th>GROSS WEEKLY INCOME</th>
<th>GROSS MONTHLY INCOME</th>
<th>GROSS YEARLY INCOME</th>
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<td>EACH ADDITIONAL FAMILY MEMBER</td>
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To contact WIC for more information or to make an appointment, call 304-598-5181 or check out monchd.org/wic.

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