Memo

To: WIC Coordinators
From: WIC Nutrition Unit
Date: February 5, 2014
Subject: Birth Defects Prevention

“Every 4 ½ minutes a baby is born with a birth defect.” Birth defects remain a leading cause of infant mortality.

You may have received information about January as Birth Defects Prevention Month. Although not all birth defects can be prevented, women may lower their risk of having a baby with a birth defect through healthy lifestyle choices and medical interventions before and during pregnancy.

This emphasizes the importance of the work that you do since, as a part of WIC services, staff assess and provide information and referrals related to many of the recommended public health guidelines for lowering the risk of birth defects. These include:

- Consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.
- Manage chronic maternal illnesses such as diabetes, seizure disorders, or phenylketonuria (PKU).
- Talk to your health care provider about taking any medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight before becoming pregnant.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs.
- See a health care provider regularly.
- Avoid toxic substances at home and at work.
- Ensure protection against intimate partner violence.
- Use contraception if taking medications that increase the risk for birth defects.
- Know your family medical history and seek reproductive genetic counseling, if appropriate.

Women who are pregnant or who can become pregnant are encouraged to follow these guidelines throughout their reproductive years. WIC has a special opportunity since we serve women into the later postpartum period when this counseling may become especially meaningful.

The following are resources if you or your staff would like additional information:

- National Birth Defects Prevention Network resource packet
- MDH Birth Defects Monitoring and Analysis Program