



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Awareness of Birth Defects Prevention Is a Priority**  
***January hosts National Birth Defects Prevention Month and Folic Acid Awareness Week***

Maysville, KY, January 2018 –The Buffalo Trace District Health Department is working with state and national partners to raise awareness of birth defects and how some of them can be prevented. Local health departments, the Kentucky Department for Public Health, and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) are promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month in January, as well as Folic Acid Awareness Week, which is January 7 through 13. **Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States. In Kentucky, and across the nation, these birth defects are one of the most common causes of death for children under the age of five.**

Although not all birth defects can be prevented, steps can be taken to ensure the optimal health of a pregnancy. One of the easiest steps is for women of childbearing age to get 400 micrograms of folic acid every day. Folic acid is a form of vitamin B that helps cells reproduce, so women should have high levels of folic acid in their bodies at least one month prior to the start of a pregnancy.

Since around half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages all women between the ages of 15 and 45 to take a folic acid supplement such as a multivitamin, or to eat at least one serving per day of a breakfast cereal that provides 100 percent of the daily requirement for folic acid. Adequate consumption of folic acid can lead to as much as a 70 percent decrease in the likelihood of having a baby with major brain or spine defects like anencephaly and spina bifida.

In 2018, the National Birth Defects Prevention Network's specific focus is raising awareness of infection-prevention as a way of avoiding birth defects. The decision to focus on infections in 2018 was in part due to the last year's spread of the Zika virus and awareness of its negative effects on developing fetuses. It is important to note, however, that Zika is not the only infection that can cause birth defects. Chicken pox, toxoplasmosis, some kinds of strep and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and even having a high fever during early pregnancy can lead to birth defects. All people, but particularly women of childbearing age, are encouraged to stay vaccinated and practice good hygiene like handwashing.

More generally speaking, the CDC has long recommended that women get as healthy as they can prior to becoming pregnant, and attend all their prenatal care appointments. Getting healthy includes striving to reach and maintain a healthy weight, eat a balanced diet, and control diabetes, which can cause serious complications for a pregnancy.

Furthermore, pregnant women also should abstain from drinking alcohol, including beer and wine, throughout the entirety of their pregnancy. They should also not use tobacco and should avoid second-hand smoke, as even being around tobacco smoke puts a woman and her pregnancy at risk for complications. Pregnant women should also discuss all medications with their healthcare providers, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and herbal remedies.

The Buffalo Trace District Health Department (BTDHD) is the local government agency charged with protecting the health of Mason and Robertson County residents. More information about National Birth Defects Prevention Month can be found on the health department's website ([buffalotracehealth.com](http://buffalotracehealth.com)) or at [CDC.gov](http://CDC.gov) or [NBDPN.org](http://NBDPN.org). The health department's mission is to lead and empower communities to achieve better health.

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