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**DOH Recognizes January as National Birth Defects Prevention Month**  
*-- Birth Defects Remain Leading Cause of Infant Mortality in U.S. and Florida --*

**TALLAHASSEE** – In an effort to increase awareness of the tremendous impact birth defects have on Florida’s families and children, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) recognizes January as National Birth Defects Prevention Month.

For the past 20 years, birth defects have been the leading cause of infant mortality in both the United States and Florida, accounting for more than one in five infant deaths. The Florida Birth Defects Registry estimates that one out of every 41 babies is born with a birth defect.

“Prevention is key to reducing the risk for birth defects,” said DOH Deputy State Health Officer for Children’s Medical Services Elizabeth Ford, M.D., M.B.A. “Pregnant women and those who are planning a pregnancy should avoid alcohol, tobacco use, street drugs, and medications as these can cause birth defects and pregnancy complications.”

Although not all birth defects are preventable, women can significantly reduce the risks of various birth defects. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, for instance, is one of the leading causes of mental retardation and is 100 percent preventable. All women capable of becoming pregnant should take a daily multivitamin containing 400 micrograms of the B-vitamin folic acid. Studies show that taking this vitamin prior to and in the early weeks of pregnancy reduces the risk of having a baby with certain birth defects of the brain and spine, including spina bifida -- the leading cause of childhood paralysis.

Public health efforts to study birth defects and provide education are supported through partnerships with the Florida Birth Defects Registry, the Florida Folic Acid Council and the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Interagency Action Group.

To learn more about birth defects surveillance and prevention in Florida visit [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us) and click on Birth Defects Registry listed in the left hand column; log on to or <http://flbdr.hsc.usf.edu> or [www.folicacidnow.net](http://www.folicacidnow.net).

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