

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Birth Defects Prevention Month 2018
Prevent to Protect: Prevent Infections for Baby's Protection

TOPEKA, Kan. – January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) is actively working to raise awareness of how common birth defects are and what steps can help to prevent them.

In the United States, a baby is born with a birth defect every 4½ minutes - about 120,000 babies each year - with around 1,150 cases occurring in Kansas. 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.

KDHE is participating in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by coordinating with local health agencies and healthcare providers to encourage prevention and awareness of birth defects. In addition to its efforts in prevention, KDHE also offers support to children with special health care needs. Further information on services can be found at www.kdheks.gov/shcn.

Although not all birth defects can be prevented, many steps can be taken to increase a woman's chance of having a healthy baby. It is important to prevent those infections that can increase the risk of birth defects and other health problems for mothers and babies.

Here are some helpful tips for pregnant women or women who may become pregnant:

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.

In addition to following these tips to prevent infections, all women capable of becoming pregnant 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. These steps can go a long way in promoting a healthy you and a healthy baby. More information about the Kansas Birth Defects Program, including national resources, can be found at www.kdheks.gov/bfh/birth_defects.htm.

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KDHE's mission is to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans.