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MDHHS offers 5 tips for preventing birth defects during National Birth Defects Prevention Month

LANSING, Mich. – Every 4½ minutes a baby is born with a birth defect in the United States. That's why the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is joining with leading prenatal health experts from the National Birth Defects Prevention Network, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, March of Dimes, Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention and MotherToBaby this month to increase awareness of five critical tips to reduce the chances of having a baby with a birth defect.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Month campaign theme, "Best for You. Best for Baby" aims to raise awareness of the roughly 1 in 33 birth defects cases occurring in Michigan each year.

"Not all birth defects can be prevented, but you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by doing all you can to be your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health for MDHHS.

Follow these five tips to increase your chances of having a healthy baby:

1. Take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
 - Folic acid is very important because it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine.
2. Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
 - There are often benefits to continuing treatment throughout pregnancy. Discussing a treatment plan before a pregnancy allows a woman and her healthcare provider to weigh the pros and cons of all options to keep mom and baby as healthy as possible.
3. Get up to date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
 - Having the right vaccinations, like the influenza and Tdap vaccines, at the right time during pregnancy can help keep a woman and her baby healthy.
4. Try to reach a healthy weight before you get pregnant.
 - Obesity increases the risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications.

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5. Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
 - There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy and drinking alcohol while pregnant can cause birth defects and cognitive impairment in the baby
 - Smoking during pregnancy can cause dangerous chemicals to damage the placenta and/or reach baby's bloodstream.
 - The opioid epidemic has led to a sharp increase in Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and premature birth.

The MDHHS Birth Defects Education and Outreach program encourages Michiganders to be active participants in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by following and sharing #Best4YouBest4Baby messages on social media.

For more information, visit [Migrc.org/providers/birth-defects-prevention](https://www.migrc.org/providers/birth-defects-prevention).

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