

Take Care To Prevent Birth Defects

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Contact: Doug Bolnick, Public Information Officer, 636.949.7408

St. Charles County – Although it's reported that one in 33 babies in the United States is born with a major birth defect and there is no way to prevent all defects, there are things that women can do to increase their chances of a healthy pregnancy.

Making easy behavioral changes and maintaining a healthy lifestyle — before, during and after a pregnancy — will go a long way toward helping a mother and her baby develop:

Eat a nutritious and balanced diet

Consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily (for best results, begin at least one month before becoming pregnant and continue through childbirth)

Avoid alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other toxic substances before, during and after pregnancy

Do not eat raw or undercooked meats, avoid unpasteurized milk products, and stay away from fish/shellfish reported to be high in mercury during pregnancy

Visit a health care provider regularly and discuss any medical problems/concerns/medications taken with this individual before and during pregnancy

To help expectant and new mothers discover behaviors that can enhance child development, the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment participates in the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC). WIC provides assistance to all qualifying participants with the goal to ensure the health of growing families. Offered at no cost, the supplemental program provides specific nutritious foods and healthcare resources to pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as postpartum women, infants and young children up to age five.

As research has shown that WIC participants have fewer low birth weight babies, experience fewer infant deaths, eat healthier and more often obtain regular healthcare during pregnancy, the WIC program tailors assistance to the needs of the individual. Based upon nutritional requirements, foods chosen are low in sugar, saturated fat and cholesterol, and are good sources of vitamins A, C and D, calcium, iron, protein and fiber. In addition to nutrition and breastfeeding education, WIC staff provides referrals to local healthcare providers and other supplemental resources in our community.

The county's WIC program is administered at the health department facility (located at 1650 Boone's Lick Road in St. Charles). WIC participants must meet specific income guidelines (http://health.mo.gov/living/families/wic/eligibility_income.php) and be determined at "nutritional risk" by health professionals. In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, the department is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race,

color, national origin, sex, age or disability. Persons interested in applying for WIC resources should call 636.949.7402.

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