



State of Louisiana

Department of Health and Hospitals

Maternal and Child Health Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 8, 2009

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NATIONAL FOLIC ACID AWARENESS WEEK IS JANUARY 4-11, 2010

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS STATES, IT TAKES A HEALTHY WOMAN TO PRODUCE A HEALTHY BABY Folic Acid Taken Daily -One Year Before Pregnancy Greatly Improves Birth Outcome

Baton Rouge, LA – In efforts to increase the awareness of Folic Acid, the **Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals** stresses the importance for women to be healthy prior to pregnancy and how Folic Acid can help. The risk of birth defects can be reduced by nearly 70% if a woman consumes at least 400 micrograms of Folic Acid a day. Women who consume the recommended amount of Folic Acid supplement daily, one year before pregnancy occurs are shown to have fewer complications, in terms of preterm birth, low birth weight and birth defects, Folic Acid may also reduce their risk of miscarriage. Neural Tube Defects are birth defects effecting the spine and brain and typically occur in the first 28 days of pregnancy – *before* most women even know they are pregnant. In addition to these compelling reductions in risk, Folic Acid benefits the mother by strengthening skin, hair and nails, as it allows cells to rapidly reproduce, helping our bodies repair themselves faster.

According to Louisiana data, nearly 70% of women reported that they heard or read that taking folic acid can help prevent some birth defects and yet only 30% of these women admitted to taking folic acid daily in the month before their pregnancy. To help address this gap, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals offers folic acid vitamins to all of its family planning clients in parish health units statewide.

“Our goal is to make people to understand that it takes more than 9 months to have a healthy baby. Women in their childbearing years should begin taking Folic Acid at least one year prior to pregnancy,” says Dr. Joan Wightkin, *Maternal and Child Health Administrator for the Office of Public Health*. Dr. Wightkin continues “Being healthy and prepared in the years preceding a pregnancy greatly increases the chances of having a healthy baby.”

Where can Folic Acid be found? Vitamin supplements are a great way to get the recommended daily amounts of Folic Acid, however, another source is a vast array of delicious foods. It is found in fruits such as oranges and bananas, veggies such as broccoli, spinach, kale and asparagus, dried beans and nuts and many grain products, including fortified cereals.

Partners for Healthy Babies is funded by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, Maternal and Child Health and WIC Programs. The program began because about 10 percent of all babies in Louisiana were born small and weak. These are called low birth weight babies (less than 5.5 pounds) and many of them die before their first birthday. Our goal is to link pregnant women to the services they need to help them be healthy, and have healthy babies. **1-800-251-BABY - www.1800251baby.org**