

Digital Toolkit

NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH

We are excited to present the National Birth Defects Prevention Month (NBDPM) 2021 Digital Toolkit! Together, we hope to raise awareness about the impact of birth defects on our communities and to share tips for preventing birth defects.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), MotherToBaby, March of Dimes (MOD), and state health departments, has developed this toolkit, focusing on the theme, “Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.”

In this toolkit, the term “birth defects” is used to state that a child has a medical, anatomical, and biological difference or anomaly. Children with birth defects and their families face very unique and sometimes difficult challenges. However, there are also many positive and beautiful moments parents share with their child. Depending on the condition, children living with birth defects can do what other children do. It just may look a little different or take a bit longer. Birth defect terms can feel like labels and may seem upsetting. On the other hand, using these terms can help parents and families access the right type of care, referral to services, and find other families with similar challenges.

The NBDPN works to improve the understanding of birth defects by improving data and contributing to research towards causes and treatments. Local or national support groups can connect you with parents who have been through similar experiences. Ask your provider for more information or seek assistance from your state’s birth defect network.

Who Should Use This Toolkit

Health agencies, foundations, organizations, digital ambassadors, and other partners can use the materials and resources provided in this toolkit. You can use this toolkit whether you have numerous communication platforms or just one.

How to Use This Toolkit

We make it easy to use by providing a list of ideas! Each activity can be done individually or in coordination with partners at the state or community level. We invite you to use the toolkit to design your own promotions, pick and choose relevant content for your audiences, and copy or adapt contents to take advantage of particular news or issues in your community.

Help Us Spread the Word

Help us generate engagement and awareness by using and customizing the following toolkit items:

- [Themed resources](#): Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.
 - These resources can serve as a foundation for your messaging. They provide information on each of the five tips, a sample social media post, and links to external resources.
 - Tools you can use: animated gifs / social media engagement
- [Proclamation](#): tailor the proclamation to your state and disseminate locally to raise awareness.

- [News release](#): pitch a news release to local newspapers to amplify the messages and generate a buzz in your community.
- [Education material for men](#): a factsheet full of valuable information for fathers-to-be.
- Appendix 1: [Social media “how to” kit](#)
- Appendix 2: [Adapting materials for local partners](#)
 - Announcements, sample memo, letter to local health department (LHD) agency, awareness articles

Create a buzz with social media: Use the hashtag #Best4YouBest4Baby on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other channels to help us track engagement. Modify the example posts in the themed resources to fit your organization (e.g., add a statement about why your organization cares about birth defects prevention). We encourage you to include an image with each post, as internet users are more likely to share items with photos and videos.

Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.

Theme Resources

Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by doing what you can to be your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy.

Tip 1: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Folic acid is very important because, when taken before and during early pregnancy, it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. Our bodies use this B vitamin to make new cells.

Folate is found naturally in certain fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Folic acid, the synthetic or man-made form of folate, is found in fortified foods (called "enriched foods"), such as breads, pastas, and cereals. In addition to eating foods with folate from a varied diet (including foods like spinach and avocado), you can:

- Take a vitamin that has folic acid in it every day.
 - Vitamins can be found at most local pharmacies and grocery stores. Check the label on the bottle to be sure it contains 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid, which is 400mcg.
 - Most vitamins sold in the United States have the recommended amount of folic acid women need each day.
- Eat fortified foods.
 - You can find folic acid in some breads, pasta, breakfast cereals, and corn masa flour.
 - Be sure to check the nutrition facts label and look for one that has "100%" next to folate.



Social Media:

Looking for a tip to be your healthiest self before & during #pregnancy? Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Folic Acid Recommendations | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/recommendations.html>

Folic Acid Fact Sheet | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/folic-acid.aspx>

Why, How, When, What | Baby Center

https://www.babycenter.com/0_folic-acid-why-you-need-it-before-and-during-pregnancy_476.bc

Folic Acid | Office on Women's Health

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/folic-acid>

MTHFR Gene, Folic Acid, and Preventing Neural Tube Defects | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/mthfr-gene-and-folic-acid.html>

Tip 2: Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.

Many women need to take medicine to stay healthy, and there are often benefits to continuing your treatment throughout your pregnancy. If you are trying to have a baby or are just thinking about it, now is a great time to start getting ready for pregnancy by talking with your doctor about medications you may be taking.

Women who are already pregnant or think that they could be pregnant should also see their healthcare providers. Start prenatal care right away. It is important to see your healthcare provider regularly throughout pregnancy. So be sure to keep all prenatal care appointments.

If you're concerned about going to your appointments because of COVID-19, ask your healthcare provider what steps they're taking to separate healthy patients from those who may be sick. Some healthcare providers may choose to cancel or postpone some visits. Others may switch certain appointments to telemedicine visits, which are appointments over the phone or video. These decisions may be based on the situation in your community as well as your individual health risks.

There are often benefits to continuing your treatment throughout your pregnancy. However, if you and your healthcare provider decide to change your medicines, discussing a treatment plan before a pregnancy can give you time to consider all options that can help keep you and your developing baby as healthy as possible.

Moms and moms-to-be deserve the best - including the very best mental health. Depression during and after pregnancy is common and treatable. If you think you have depression, seek treatment from your health care provider as soon as possible.

Planning how to take care of your health conditions before you become pregnant can help keep you and your developing baby healthy. Don't forget to talk about your family history when visiting your healthcare provider! Based on your family history, your doctor might alter your care or refer you for genetic or nutritional counseling.

Social Media:

Visiting your healthcare provider before & during pregnancy is key, especially if thinking about stopping or starting any medication. Have questions about medication during pregnancy? Visit <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/> for access to expert information. # Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Factsheets on Medications | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets-parent/>

MotherToBaby Pregnancy Study | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/ongoing-study/no-current-health-condition-2/>



Medication and Pregnancy | American Pregnancy Association
<http://americanpregnancy.org/medication/medication-and-pregnancy/>

Medication Tips and Facts | U.S. Food and Drug Administration
<https://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/byaudience/forwomen/ucm118567.htm>

Treating for Two | CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/treatingfortwo/index.html>

Over-the-Counter Medication in Pregnancy | American Family Physician
<https://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0615/p2517.html>

COVID-19 and Pregnancy | CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

Tip 3: Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.

Vaccines help protect you and your baby. Some vaccinations, such as the flu (influenza) vaccine and the Tdap vaccine (adult tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine), are specifically recommended during each pregnancy.

Having the right vaccinations at the right time can help keep you and your baby healthy. Get a flu shot and Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to help protect yourself and your baby.



Flu: You can get the flu shot before or during each pregnancy. Pregnant women with flu have an increased risk of serious problems for their pregnancy, including preterm birth. Getting a flu shot is the first and most important step in protecting against flu. The flu shot given during pregnancy has been shown to protect both mom and baby (for up to 6 months after delivery) from the flu.

Tdap: You should get the Tdap vaccine near the end of each pregnancy (weeks 27 – 36). After getting the shot, your body will make protective antibodies (proteins made by the body to fight off diseases) and will pass some of the antibodies to your baby before birth. These antibodies give your baby some short-term protection against whooping cough (also called pertussis). These antibodies can also protect your baby from some of the more serious complications of whooping cough. Partners/spouses and other family members who live in the home or will be helping to take care of a new baby should also receive the Tdap vaccine before the baby is born.

Social Media:

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by being your healthiest self both before & during pregnancy. Vaccines help protect you & your developing baby against serious diseases. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Seasonal Influenza in Pregnancy Fact Sheet | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/seasonal-influenza-the-flu-pregnancy/>

Flu Vaccine Safety and Pregnancy | CDC
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/qa_vacpregnant.htm

Get the Whooping Cough Vaccine While You Are Pregnant | CDC
<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant/mom/get-vaccinated.html>

Vaccinations and Pregnancy | March of Dimes
<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/vaccinations-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Vaccines in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/vaccines-pregnancy/>
<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/las-vacunaz/> (Spanish)

Tdap Vaccine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis-tdap-vaccine-pregnancy/>
<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-vacuna-contra-influenza-estacional-flu-shot-durante-el-embarazo/> (Spanish)

Hepatitis Vaccine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hepatitis-vaccine-pregnancy/>
<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/hepatitis-la-vacuna-durante-el-embarazo/> (Spanish)

Tip 4: Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.

Your weight may increase your risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications. If you are underweight, overweight, or obese, talk with your healthcare provider about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight before you get pregnant. Eating healthy foods and being physically active are great ways to prepare for pregnancy.



One size does not fit all. During pregnancy, follow the guidelines for weight gain that match your weight before pregnancy. Talk to your provider about making physical activity a part of healthy pregnancy.

Social Media:

Prepping for #pregnancy? Work with your healthcare provider now to achieve a safe & healthy weight for you & your baby. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Weight Gain during Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-weight-gain.htm>

Women's Weight before Pregnancy and Child Development | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/features/keyfinding-women-weight-child-development.html>

Eating for Two When Over or Under Weight | American Pregnancy Association

<http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/eating-for-two/>

Tracking your Weight | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/pdfs/maternal-infant-health/pregnancy-weight-gain/tracker/single/Obese_Weight_Tracker_508Tagged.pdf

Exercise in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/exercise-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-ejercicio/>

Pregnancy and Eating Disorders | The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/pregnancy-and-eating-disorders>

Being Overweight During Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/being-overweight-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Tip 5: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Alcohol: There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy or when trying to get pregnant. A developing baby can be exposed to the same level of alcohol as the mother during pregnancy. This can result in a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. In addition, alcohol may make it harder for a woman to become pregnant. Alcohol use in pregnancy can also increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).



Alcohol can have negative effects on a baby's development at any time during pregnancy, including before a woman even knows she is pregnant. That is why it is important to stop drinking alcohol when you start trying to get pregnant.

Tobacco: Today, tobacco can be consumed in multiple ways; this includes traditional forms like cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chew, snuff, and hookah as well as newer forms like e-cigarettes/vapes.

Smoking may cause cancer, heart disease, and other major health problems. Smoking during pregnancy can harm the placenta and a developing baby and can cause certain birth defects. The placenta grows in your uterus (womb) and supplies the baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Cigarette smoke has over 4,000 chemicals. When you smoke during pregnancy, chemicals like nicotine, carbon monoxide and tar damage the placenta and/or pass through the placenta and umbilical cord to reach your baby's bloodstream. Quitting smoking will help you feel better and provide a healthier environment for your baby.

Because they are relatively new and are not well-regulated, there is less information known about the effects of e-cigarettes on pregnancy. Until more and better information is available, it is recommended that pregnant women not use e-cigarettes.

Marijuana: During pregnancy, the chemicals in marijuana (in particular, tetrahydrocannabinol or THC) pass through mom to a developing baby, and can harm a baby's development. In animal studies, combined exposure to even low levels of marijuana in combination with alcohol have been associated with impaired brain development of the baby (1, 2). More research is needed to better understand how marijuana may affect mom and baby during pregnancy. However, it is recommended that pregnant women not use marijuana.

Prescription Opioids: Painkillers such as codeine, morphine, and oxycodone may be prescribed following an injury, surgery, or dental work. Any type of opioid exposure during pregnancy can cause neonatal abstinence syndrome, a condition in which the newborn experiences withdrawal from certain drugs after exposure during pregnancy. If you are pregnant and taking an opioid, talk to your doctor before making any changes. Ask about options for opioid treatment to decide what's best for you and your pregnancy.

Other Drugs: Using certain drugs during pregnancy can cause health problems for a woman and her developing baby. If you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant and can't stop using drugs—please ask for help! A healthcare provider can help you with counseling, treatment, and other support services.

Social Media:

What is best for you is also best for your baby. Eliminate the use of harmful substances during pregnancy (including #alcohol & #tobacco) to avoid harmful effects on your baby. #Best4YouBest4Baby

References and Resources:

1. Boa-Amponsem O, Zhang C, Mukhopadhyay S, Ardrey I, Cole GJ. Ethanol and cannabinoids interact to alter behavior in zebrafish fetal alcohol spectrum disorder model. (2020) Birth Defects Res 111:775-788.
2. Breit KR, Zamudio B, Thomas, JD. The effects of alcohol and cannabinoid exposure during the brain growth spurt on behavioral development in rats. (2020) Birth Defects Res 111:760-774.

Substance use in Pregnancy | World Health Organization

http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/activities/pregnancy_substance_use/en/

Using Illegal Drugs during Pregnancy | American Pregnancy Association

<http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/illegal-drugs-during-pregnancy/>

Alcohol Use in Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/alcohol-use.html>

Alcohol during Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/alcohol-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Alcohol in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/alcohol-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-alcohol/>

Cigarette Smoke in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/cigarette-smoking-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-fumar-cigarro-el-embarazo/>

Prescription Opioids in Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/prescription-opioids-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Heroin in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding |

MotherToBaby <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/heroin/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/heroina/>

Cocaine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/cocaine-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-cocaina/>

Marijuana in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/marijuana-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/marihuana/>

Methamphetamine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/methamphetamine/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-metanfetamina/>

Codeine in

Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/codeine/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-codeina/>

Marijuana use in Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/factsheets/pregnancy.htm>



Tools You Can Use

Graphics Social Media Ideas

Tip 1: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

BEST FOR YOU. BEST FOR BABY.

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*Best for you.
Best for baby.*



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Tip 2: Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.

BEST FOR YOU. BEST FOR BABY.


TIP:
BOOK A VISIT WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER BEFORE STOPPING OR STARTING ANY MEDICATION.



NBDPN

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Tip 3: Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.

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NBDPN



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NBDPN *Best for you. Best for baby.*

Tip 4: Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.

BEST FOR YOU. BEST FOR BABY.

TIP:
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NBDPN



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NBDPN *Best for you. Best for baby.*

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NBDPN *Best for you. Best for baby.*

Tip 5: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

BEST FOR YOU. BEST FOR BABY.

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AVOID HARMFUL
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NBDPN



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Best for baby.**



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NBDPN



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**Best for you.
Best for baby.**



Additional graphics and animated GIFs, available on CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/materials.html>.



Social Media Engagement Idea

Use the "**Best for You. Best for Baby.**" theme by encouraging "selfies" of women carrying out some of the theme tips for birth defects prevention.

Examples

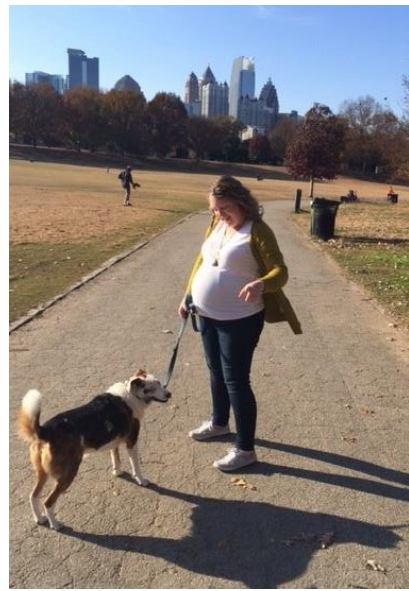
Kerri posted:

I'm taking my prenatal vitamin every day because it's best for me and best for baby. What are you doing that's #Best4YouBest4Baby? Show it in a selfie!



Kara posted:

When I was pregnant, I frequently took my dog for a walk to not only get moving but also to get a little sunshine and fresh air. #Best4YouBest4Baby



Proclamation

January is National
Birth Defects
Prevention Month!

National Birth Defects Prevention Month, January 2021

Whereas, birth defects are common, costly, and critical;

Whereas, birth defects affect an estimated [enter number here] infants in [enter your state here] each year;

Whereas, birth defects are a leading cause of death in the first year of life, associated with one in [enter number here] infant deaths in [enter your state here];

Whereas, birth defects can occur in any family regardless of race, ethnicity, health history, or economic status;

Whereas, steps can be taken to reduce the chance that a child will be born with a birth defect, such as taking a daily vitamin with folic acid before and during pregnancy, getting regular prenatal care, becoming up-to-date with vaccinations, reaching a healthy weight before pregnancy, and stopping the use of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy; and

Whereas, early identification of a child with a birth defect coupled with early intervention services typically improves the child's quality of life.

NOW, THEREFORE, I [enter name here], GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF [YOUR STATE HERE], DO HEREBY PROCLAIM JANUARY 2021 AS NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH.

Sample News Release

Drop-in News Content

LEADING HEALTH EXPERTS EMPHASIZE 5 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

'Best for You. Best for Baby.' Focus of National Birth Defects Prevention Month 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 1, 2021

Contact: [**Name of person submitting release**]
[**Contact Phone Number**] – or – [**Contact Email**]

[**City, State**] – “Every 4 ½ minutes a baby is born with a birth defect in the United States. Simply put – it doesn’t have to be that common,” said [**Organization representative**]. That’s why [**Organization**] is joining with leading prenatal health experts from the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, the March of Dimes, Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention and MotherToBaby this month to increase awareness of 5 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 [**prevalence information for your state**] birth defects cases occurring in [**State**] each year. “While we can’t prevent all birth defects, the following steps increase a woman’s chance of having a healthy baby,” explained [**Organization representative**].

- 1. Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) 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 when taken before and during early pregnancy.
- 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 health care provider to weigh the pros and cons of all options to keep mom and baby as healthy as possible.
- 3. Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.**
 - Having the right vaccinations, like the flu and Tdap vaccines, at the right time during pregnancy can help keep a woman and her baby healthy.
- 4. Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.**
 - Obesity increases the risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications.
- 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 its exposure can cause major birth defects.
 - Smoking during pregnancy can cause dangerous chemicals to damage the placenta and/or reach baby’s bloodstream.
 - The opioid addiction epidemic has led to a sharp increase in Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), premature birth and drug withdrawal in developing babies.

"Birth defects are a common cause of death in the first year of a baby's life, but change happens through awareness," added Jason L. Salemi, PhD, MPH, NBDPN President. "We're thrilled **[Organization]** is doing its part to positively change the outcome for babies across **[State]**."

How You Can Help

[Organization] encourages health advocates as well as the general public to be an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Follow and share **#Best4YouBest4Baby** messages on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. In addition, the complete 2021 NBDPN Birth Defects Prevention Month information packet, including this year's primary tips for birth defects prevention, "**Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects**," is available online at: <https://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm.php>. All materials can be printed, electronically conveyed, or added to websites for distribution as needed.

Additional Resources to Support Healthy Pregnancies

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) strives to advance the health and well-being of our nation's most vulnerable populations.

www.cdc.gov/birthdefects

American Academy of Pediatrics

Dedicated to the health of all children, providing age-specific health information.

www.healthychildren.org

MotherToBaby, a free service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)

Communicate directly with experts about exposures, like medications, vaccines and more, during pregnancy and breastfeeding by calling toll-free (866) 626-6847, texting questions to (855) 999-3525, live chatting or emailing at

www.MotherToBaby.org

Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention

An international and multidisciplinary group of scientists including researchers, clinicians, epidemiologists, and public health professionals from academia, government and industry who study birth defects, reproduction, and disorders of developmental origin.

<https://birthdefectsresearch.org/>

March of Dimes

An organization aiming to make sure babies get the strongest start possible as well as reducing the rate of prematurity.

www.marchofdimes.org

Dads play an important role in a healthy pregnancy.

Education Flyer

Best for Dad. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Dads to Help Prevent Birth Defects.

When David thought about his future and the dad he wanted to be, he made a commitment to himself to provide for his family as best he could. As he talked with his healthcare provider, he was reminded that his commitment to his family starts even before his children are born.

Dads like David will contribute half of the biological building blocks for their children. Keeping himself healthy will help David pass along healthy genes and give his children their best chance at a healthy start. When fathers are involved during pregnancy, babies have fewer complications at birth.

Like David, you may be thinking about the family you may have one day. What is best for dad before and during pregnancy is also best for your baby.



Tip 1: Try to maintain a healthy weight

- Incorporate eating healthy food and regular physical activity into your daily routine. Obesity in men has been linked to lower fertility and a higher risk of insulin dysregulation issues in their children (1).

Tip 2: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances

- Protect yourself and your partner by quitting smoking and avoiding secondhand smoke and air pollution.
- Do not drink excessively or use certain drugs, such as cocaine or heroin.
- Avoid excessive use of marijuana. Use of marijuana has been linked to lower sperm production and lower sperm quality.
- Avoid use of anabolic androgenic steroids, particularly when trying to conceive. Use of testosterone derivatives has been associated with short-term subfertility and longer-term decreases in normal testosterone production (2).
- If you require pain management or addiction treatment, talk to your healthcare provider about alternatives to long-term use of opioids. Long-term use of opioids can interfere with testosterone production, which is important for sperm production.

Tip 3: Avoid harmful workplace exposures

- Ask questions about hazards in your workplace. You have a legal right to receive information on hazards in your workplace.
- Learn how to avoid bringing work hazards home on your skin, clothes, and shoes.

Tip 4: Avoid infections

- Get the flu shot and the whooping cough vaccine to avoid passing these viruses to your pregnant partner and your newborn infant.
- Protect yourself and your partner from insects known to carry diseases such as Zika virus. Zika can cause birth defects.
 - When mosquitos are active, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
 - Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus (para-menthane-3, 8-diol).
 - If you are planning to conceive with your partner, consider avoiding travel to an area with Zika virus or wait at least three months after your return before trying to conceive with your partner.
- Practice good hygiene.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STDs).

Tip 5: Maintain good mental well-being and be supportive of your partner during pregnancy

- Talk to your healthcare provider about resources to plan for mental well-being during parenthood. Some women experience depression during pregnancy or immediately after birth, and this can impact their partner.
- Take an interest in your partner's health during pregnancy. Infants have fewer complications at birth when fathers are involved with their partners during pregnancy (3).
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your role in care and development of your future child (4).

References and Resources

1. Soubry A. POHaD: why we should study future fathers. (2018) *Environ Epigenet.* 4:1-7.
2. Christou MA, Christou PA, Markozannes G, Tsatsoulis A, Mastorakos G, and Tigas S. Effects of Anabolic Androgenic Steroids on the Reproductive System of Athletes and Recreational Users: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. (2017) *Sports Med* 47:1869–1883.
3. Alio AP, Kornosky JL, Mbah AK, Marty PJ and Salihi HM. The impact of paternal involvement on feto- infant morbidity among Whites, Blacks and Hispanics. (2010) *Matern Child Health J* 14:735-41.
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5. Links to information on drugs and male fertility:
<https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/182/6/473/82600>
<https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/29/8/1629/2913908>
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/15229-drugs-and-male-fertility>

Appendix 1: Social Media “How to” Kit



Join us this January to promote National Birth Defects Prevention Month using your social media networks. Use this resource to raise awareness about #Best4YouBest4Baby and join the conversation about preventing birth defects.

In this appendix, we provide suggestions for using various social media platforms to promote National Birth Defects Prevention Month, such as example posts. Also included are resources on evaluation and useful tools.

Facebook

Facebook is the largest social media platform, with about 1.59 billion daily active users.

Audience


- 53% of Facebook users are women, and 47% are men.
- 79% of all adults between 18-49 years old use Facebook.
- Individuals who upload photos and post personal status updates, as well as public-facing Organizations- non-profits, businesses, and government organizations such as the CDC.

Best Practices

- Posts can be 420 characters or less, plus a web link. Shorter lengths are ideal.
- Posts should be action-oriented, include a specific call to action. Should also include a link to a web page, photo or video.

Tips

- Use a casual, but professional tone.
- Like National Birth Defects Prevention Network’s page on Facebook. Share and comment.
- Tag National Birth Defects Prevention Network in your own posts.
- Share the “**Best for You. Best for Baby.**” badge, CDC social media graphics, or change your profile photo to any of these images!

 Planning how to take care of your health conditions before you become pregnant can help keep you and your developing baby healthy!





Twitter is an online news and social networking service with about 330 million users.

Audience

- An equal amount of men and women use Twitter.
- 38% of Americans ages 18-29 years use Twitter.
- Individuals post personal mini blogs, and stay up-to-date with news and culture.
- Businesses and organizations use Twitter for marketing and as an educational tool.

Best Practices

- Limits posts to 280 characters per tweet (including spaces).
- Users identify themselves by their username (e.g. @NBDPN).
- Share messages from other users by retweeting those that are relevant.
- Write concise tweets and limit abbreviations.
- Include images + videos.
 - Tweets with images are 150% more likely to get retweets than text-only tweets.
 - Videos are 6x more likely to be retweeted than photos and 3x more than GIFs.
- Use hashtags to help discovery.
 - 1-2 hashtags are ideal.
 - Do research before jumping on trending hashtags. Join the conversations when it's relevant.

Tips

- A "tweet" is the message you post and a "handle" is the username.
- Use the character counting tool in Microsoft Word to calculate the number of characters in a draft tweet.
- Follow @NBDPN and @CDC_NCBDDD on Twitter. Retweet, favorite, and comment.
- Use the **#Best4YouBest4Baby** hashtag when sharing information, resources, photos or your own experiences.
- Ask a question, highlight a key statistic, or provide a specific call to action.
- The best time to tweet is around 3pm if you hope to engage with businesses. If you want more general public engagement, it's best to tweet outside of working hours.



Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform made for sharing photos and videos, with about 800 million users.

Audience

- 37% of US adults use Instagram, consisting mainly of 18-49-year-olds.
- Instagram usage is 12% greater among women versus men.
- Pew Research Center reports that, in 2018, about 67% of Americans between 18-29-year olds and 47% of 30-49-year olds use Instagram.
- Individuals share their best photos or videos and follow people and groups with common interests.
- Organizations use Instagram to bring awareness and educate through visuals.

Best Practices

- Post regularly and during optimal times to keep your audience engaged.
- Use relevant hashtags generously.
- Ask questions in your captions that people will be eager to answer.
- Include faces – photos with faces get more engagement.
- Use the caption to provide context for your visuals, but keep it short and use plain language.

Tips

- Make your profile public to allow for more followers.
- Encourage users to submit their content ideas.
- Follow @CDCgov and @NBDPN.
- Post photos of best practices for you and your baby and incorporate the hashtag **#Best4YouBest4Baby**.
- Share your own story of how birth defects affect you. Tag photos with @NBDPN.
- Note that links in Instagram captions are not clickable. Consider creating custom bitly link.

Protect yourself and your baby by getting your #flu shot every year!
#Best4YouBest4Baby #pregnancy



Evaluation

To understand and measure your social media “reach,” we’ve gathered some resources to help track your social media presence.

- Overview of [social media metrics](#)
- Facebook
 - [Page Insights](#) allows you to view a detailed breakdown of important metrics including, total actions on a page, views, likes, followers and more. Facebook page insights also allows you to view the metrics from other pages you watch as well as the demographics of the individuals who are watching your page.
- Twitter
 - [Twitter Analytics](#) allows you to view a summary of metrics and highlights of your activity by month. Metrics in Twitter Analytics include number of tweets posted, tweet impressions, profile visits, mentions, followers, and tweets linking to you and more. This tool also allows you to view a breakdown of the audience demographics by lifestyle, consumer behavior and mobile footprint.
- Instagram
 - Instagram Insights are only available to those with business accounts. In order to create a business profile on Instagram, a Facebook account must be linked.
 - [Instagram Insights](#) provide information on your followers, when they are online, likes, comments, saves, profile visits, follows, and more.

Useful tools

Here are some useful tools to help manage your social media postings.

- [Hootsuite](#) – A free tool that allows you to schedule in advance across any social media platform.
- [IFTTT](#) – “If this, then that” is free and allows you to combine different tools to create individual sets of instructions. For example, every time you create an Instagram post, you can tell IFTTT to send a tweet.
- [Bitly](#) – Allows you to shorten any URL to fit on any social media platform.
- [Canva](#) – Create graphics for social media through professionally designed layouts for any platform.
- [Adobe Spark](#) – Create graphics and video stories from templates for any platform online or through a mobile app.

References

- CDC Social Media Tools:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools>
 - https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/GuidetoWritingforSocialMedia.pdf>
- [Social media demographics](#)
- [Pew Research Center](#)
- [Best times to post on social media](#)

Appendix 2: Adapting Toolkit for Local Partners

Materials for LHD

This appendix contains some of the materials from the 2021 National Birth Defects Prevention Month packet that have been adapted for use in raising birth defects awareness with local public health agencies. These materials supplement a more comprehensive packet that includes a sample news release, proclamation, provider letters, resources on the internet, and parent resources.

Local public health resource toolkit includes examples of:

- LPH1: Local public health announcement
- LPH2: Traditional letter to local public health agency administrators
- LPH3: Electronic letter to local public health agency staff
- LPH4: Brief awareness article
- LPH5: Awareness article for public health clinic newsletters
- LPH6: Announcement for electronic newsletters or listservs

LPH1: Sample local public health announcement

Plan ahead for January 2021 – National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

The theme for 2021 is “**Best for You. Best for Baby.**” We encourage you to begin thinking about activities you can do in your agency or community to raise public awareness. Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by doing what you can to be your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy. What is best for you is also best for your baby.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) has developed a valuable packet of information to raise awareness about birth defects. These include communication tools and resources.

Some ideas for use of the packet to raise awareness include:

- Put posters up in your agency waiting rooms, even restrooms!
- Provide fact sheets and posters on the importance of using folic acid to prevent certain types of serious birth defects.
- Volunteer to present information on birth defects and birth defects prevention at a virtual “lunch and learn” or webinar with your Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Home Visiting Nurses and other staff.
- Supply pamphlets or fact sheets for patients and professionals in doctors’ offices and clinics in the community.

Electronic materials will be sent as soon as they are ready. Please contact **[Insert contact name]** if you would like more information.

LPH2: Sample traditional letter to local public health agency administrators

January 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Administrators, County Health Departments

District Nurse Managers [Insert Other Recipients]

FROM: [Name]

[Title]

About 120,000 babies are affected by birth defects each year in the United States. In [State], approximately [###] babies are born with a birth defect each year. Not only can birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disability, they are also the most common cause of death in infants and the second most common cause of death in children aged one to four years. I have included a state wide Birth Defects Profile for [State] (as well as a [Region] Birth Defects Profile) for your reference.

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. The theme for 2021 is “Best for You. Best for Baby.” We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by doing what you can to be your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy. What is best for you is also best for your baby.

5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects

Tip ❶: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Tip ❷: Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.

Tip ❸: Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.

Tip ❹: Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.

Tip ❺: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

You can make a difference in the lives of [State] families. Please review the materials in the attached packet and use them to raise public awareness of birth defects. We invite you to share these resources with coworkers, colleagues, staff, and others who might benefit from this information.

Thank you for your support. If you have any questions or would like additional materials, please contact me or [Contact] by phone at [XXX-XXX-XXXX] or by email [Email].

LPH3: Sample electronic letter to local public health agency staff

Dear [public health nurses/practitioners/clinic staff/etc.],

The [name of state health department – hyperlinked to website] is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. The theme for 2021 is “**Best for You. Best for Baby.**”

We hope that you will join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month and raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your communities. Governor [name of Governor] has also proclaimed the month of January 2021 as Birth Defects Prevention Month [hyperlink to state proclamation]. I invite you to share the attached resources with coworkers, colleagues, local public health staff, and others who might benefit from this information.

Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States and are a leading cause of infant mortality. Babies who survive and live with birth defects are at an increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive, and social challenges. Medical care and support services only scrape the surface of the financial and emotional impact of living with birth defects. We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. But, we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant.

Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to:

- Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
- Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
- Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.
- Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

The [name of state birth defects program – hyperlink to birth defects program website] website contains information, resources, and links to free educational materials from [name of state health department], the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN). We encourage you to use these materials to raise awareness of the ways birth defects can be prevented among health professionals and the general public in your community.

You have the power to make a difference. We urge you to join us as an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2021 and to continue your efforts throughout the year.

LPH4: Sample awareness article (brief)

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.

The [name of state/local] Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) and the [State] March of Dimes to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. Join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States and are a leading cause of infant mortality. Babies who survive and live with birth defects are at an increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive, and social challenges.

Although not all birth defects can be prevented, all women who could become pregnant or are pregnant can lower their risk of having babies with birth defects by following some basic health guidelines throughout their reproductive years. These include:

- Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
- Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
- Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.
- Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

January is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

The [**name of State Birth Defects Program**] has resource materials available on their website to assist you in raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your clinic and communities. Materials include the NBDPN resource packet that can be tailored to meet your specific needs, sample partner and provider letters, a proclamation of the month, as well as links to resources for parents and other interested in learning more about birth defects.

For more information, contact [**insert name and email**]

LPH5: Sample awareness article for public health clinic newsletters

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

The [State] Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that can reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications.

This year's theme is "**Best for You. Best for Baby.**" Although not all birth defects can be prevented, the healthcare community can help all women who could become pregnant or are pregnant to lower their risk of having babies with birth defects. This includes encouraging them to follow some basic health guidelines throughout their reproductive years:

- Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
- Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
- Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.
- Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

January is a perfect time to call additional attention to the importance of folic acid in preventing certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

You can make a difference in the lives of [State] families. Additional resources can be found on the NBDPN website. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact [name and email].

LPH6: Sample announcement for electronic newsletters or listservs

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

The [name of state health department – hyperlinked to website] is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. We hope that you will join us in promoting National Birth Defects Prevention Month!

This year's theme is "**Best for You. Best for Baby.**" We know that not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all women to make healthy choices and adopt healthy habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect. Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to follow the recommended guidelines to reduce their chance of developing an infection before or during their pregnancy.

The [name of state birth defects program - hyperlink to birth defects program website] has resource materials available on their website to assist you in raising awareness of birth defects as a public health issue in your clinic and communities. Materials include the NBDPN resource packet and [State] resource packet that can be tailored to meet your specific needs. These materials contain sample partner and provider letters, a proclamation of the month, as well as links to resources for parents and other interested in learning more about birth defects and infections during pregnancy.

Now is a perfect time to draw attention to the importance of taking folic acid to prevent certain birth defects. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms (400mcg or .4mg) of folic acid daily to prevent up to 50 - 70% of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly.