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Efforts to Reduce Birth Defects Successful

The incidence of spina bifida has decreased by 32 percent in the United States over the past decade. The decrease indicates the success of the Public Health Service's recommendations released in 1992 urging women to increase their levels of folic acid intake prior to becoming pregnant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, published in the journal *Teratology* and an updated primary topic of discussion at the CDC's National Conference on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, reflects new and significant decreases in the prevalence of spina bifida and anencephaly, both neural tube defects that affect a baby's brain and spine.

"The decrease in spina bifida and other neural tube defects is exciting news, and is evidence of the need to educate women of childbearing age about the importance of folic acid to the health of their future children," said HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson.

The 10th anniversary of the Public Health Service Folic Acid recommendation—culminating in the creation of the CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities and the NCBDDD's inaugural conference—marks the success of an unprecedented national partnership of public and private groups and organizations working together to improve the health of women and babies through education efforts.

"Thanks to our work with the Food and Drug Administration, partnerships with organizations like the National Council on Folic Acid and the March of Dimes, and collaborative efforts with the medical community, we are making progress—but our work to eliminate preventable neural tube defects is not yet done," said Dr. José Cordero, the director of CDC's newly established National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

In addition to announcing the encouraging news about a decrease in NTDs, the conference, held September 18-19 in Atlanta, is honoring the work of Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Tim Shriver, the president and CEO of Special Olympics International, accepted the award on his mother's behalf.

Other speakers and participants included CNN anchor Judy Woodruff—whose son, Jeffrey, is living with spina bifida; and Dana Reeve, the wife of actor Christopher Reeve, the president of the Reeve Foundation, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled.

For more information on the conference or to request an interview with any of the participants, please contact the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at 770.488.7182 or 770.488.4399.

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with local, national and international organizations.

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