



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Have a Healthy Baby

National Birth Defects Prevention Month and Folic Acid Awareness Week

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Approximately one in 33 newborns has some form of birth defect, a leading cause of infant mortality. Not all birth defects are preventable, but one type – neural tube defects – can be largely prevented if a woman takes 400 micrograms of folic acid daily before and during pregnancy.

Alina Flores is a Health Education Specialist with CDC's National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent neural tube defects. Welcome to the show, Alina.

[Ms. Flores] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Alina, first tell us, what is a neural tube defect?

[Ms. Flores] Well, the neural tube is what eventually will form the baby's brain and spine. And the neural tube defect is when the defect is along that neural tube, so it either affects the brain development or the spine development of the baby. When the brain and the bones surrounding the brain don't form correctly, that defect is called anencephaly. That's a fatal defect; the babies born with anencephaly die shortly after birth and most are miscarried. When a baby's spine doesn't develop correctly, that's called spina bifida; that's the more common neural tube defect. Those babies are born and live long productive lives, but they do have a lot of complications and surgeries. The most common complication with spina bifida is paralysis. And some children walk and some children cannot and they use wheelchairs or crutches.

[Dr. Gaynes] So how common are neural tube defects?

[Ms. Flores] About 3,000 pregnancies in the U.S. are affected every year by one of these neural tube defects, either spina bifida or anencephaly. We've seen a decline over time, but 3,000 pregnancies still means that we have a lot of work to do in trying to prevent as many of these affected pregnancies as possible

[Dr. Gaynes] Alina, what steps can a woman take to help prevent a neural tube defect in their baby?

[Ms. Flores] Well, we do know that getting enough folic acid daily before and during the first few stages of pregnancy are critical to helping prevent a woman's risk of having a pregnancy

affected by a neural tube defect. Folic acid is easy to get; you don't even need a prescription. You can get it through a vitamin containing folic acid. You can buy the vitamin at any store or pharmacy where vitamins are sold. Also, through fortified foods, such as cereals, pastas, rice, and breads. And then we also tell women that it's very important to eat a healthy diet. We do know another thing that in the U.S., about 50 percent of pregnancies are not planned. So again, it's very important if a woman is capable of becoming pregnant, even if she's not thinking about pregnancy, that she starts taking folic acid daily, before that pregnancy, to ensure that if she does become pregnant, she has a healthy pregnancy.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about folic acid and neural tube defects?

[Ms. Flores] They can visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov and then just do a search for neural tube defects or folic acid.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Alina. I've been talking today with Alina Flores, CDC Health Education Specialist, about ways to prevent neural tube defects.

Remember, if you're a woman of child bearing age, 400 micrograms of folic acid daily is the best way to prevent neural tube defects and give your baby a healthy start.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.