

# **Delaware General Health District**

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# NEWS RELEASE

## **PRE-PREGNANCY MULTIVITAMIN USE CAN HELP PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DELAWARE, Oh., Dec. 30, 2010** – Women of childbearing age need to take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.

The National Birth Defects Prevention Month campaign in January kicks off with National Folic Acid Awareness Week, promoting use of the nutrient which is vital in preventing birth defects. The month also focuses on medication use before, during, and after pregnancy.

About 3 percent of the babies born in Ohio have birth defects, according to the Ohio Department of Health. That is close to the national average.

“Women, starting at age 12, are unaware that they need to be taking a multivitamin with folic acid every day. Folic acid is a B vitamin that is used for the growth and repair of every cell in your body. This simple, healthy habit can prevent birth defects when a woman becomes pregnant,” says Public Health Nurse Leslie Yaussy of the Delaware General Health District’s Bureau for Children with Medical Handicaps.

Yaussy also said, “Women of childbearing age should discuss any medications they are using, whether prescription or over-the-counter, with a doctor. Though many women know that certain prescription medications can cause birth defects, they may not be aware that some dietary supplements and herbal remedies may also harm a developing baby.”

Two out of three women take prescription medications during pregnancy. Not all medications need to be discontinued during pregnancy, but some might need to be changed or adjusted. Fertile women need to consider this before pregnancy, because a baby’s brain, spine, and heart start developing before a woman knows she is pregnant.

Folic acid is an essential nutrient for everyone, but is especially important in preventing birth defects. Unfortunately, too many Ohio women do not take folic acid supplements. Ohio Department of Health surveys of new mothers since 2004 show more than half took no multivitamins prior to giving birth, and less than a third took the recommended daily doses. This vitamin “nonuse” was worst among mothers aged 18-24 and among mothers in Appalachian counties.

Women who take the recommended amount of folic acid reduce their risk of having a baby with neural tube defects by up to 70 percent. One of the most common neural tube defects is spina bifida, which affects the spinal column. It can be very serious or life-threatening.

Additional information on preventing birth defects is available at [www.nbdpn.org](http://www.nbdpn.org).