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MCHD HEALTH BLOG

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
MORGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPT.



BIRTH DEFECTS AWARENESS MONTH

Did you know that in the United States every 4 ½ minutes a child is born with a birth defect? The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that nearly 120,000 babies are affected by birth defects each year. January is National Birth Defects Awareness Month.

Birth defects are changes made to structural parts of the body (heart, brain, feet, etc.) that are present at birth. Some birth defects can be mild while others may be classified as severe and have profound effects on the child. Some birth defects can be found during pregnancy, at birth, or after birth. There are lots of factors that can lead to birth defects and some causes of birth defects aren't known. However, there are some things that you can do to reduce the risk of birth defects. The CDC recommends several ways to increase your chance of having a healthy baby:

- Get regular medical care. Making sure you are healthy before getting pregnant can help have a healthy pregnancy. Also seeking prenatal care as soon as you think you are pregnant is an important step you should take to protect yourself and your baby throughout your pregnancy.
- Make sure you get enough folic acid. Many women do not realize they are pregnant during the early weeks of pregnancy so all women of child bearing age should take 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. Folic acid is an important vitamin that helps in the early development of your baby's spine and brain.
- Don't smoke (including vapes), drink alcohol, or use street drugs. These substances all increase the risk of serious birth defects. If you need help quitting, talk to your provider.
- Avoid high temperatures. Treat fevers greater than 101F with acetaminophen and avoid environments with high temperatures such as hot tubs and saunas.
- Keep track of medication you take. Talk with your provider about any medications you are currently taking or thinking about taking. Some medications are safe in pregnancy while others may cause birth defects. Don't start or stop taking any medications without talking to your medical provider first.

Visit CDC's website for more information about birth defects: cdc.gov/birthdefects.

If your child has a birth defect you are not alone. There are many resources out there to help. Identifying birth defects early and seeking early intervention can give your child the best chances in life. Talk to your provider if you are concerned or need assistance with finding resources.

Have a child with special health care needs or know someone who does? The Morgan County Health Department has a program that might be able to provide assistance. The Children with Medical Handicaps Program (CMH) is a health care program in Ohio. CMH links families of children with special health care needs to a network of quality providers and helps families obtain payment for the services their children need. Call 740-962-4572 and ask for the CMH nurse for more information.