Saving Babies through Birth Defects Research and Prevention

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical conditions that are a leading cause of death in the first year of life. CDC’s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) works to identify causes of birth defects, find opportunities to prevent them, and improve the health of those living with birth defects. Together with states, academic centers, healthcare providers, global organizations, and other partners, we strive for a day when all babies are born with the best health possible and every child thrives.

Budget

Learn more about budget

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Accomplishments

- Addressed safer medication use during pregnancy to help prevent birth defects through partnerships and research. NCBDDD expanded support for and collaboration on its Treating for Two initiative by convening key stakeholders on strategies for safer

Video: The Story of Folic Acid Fortification

This video documents the compelling story of folic acid fortification.
medication use in pregnancy. NCBDDD’s research 1) identified the medicines most commonly used by women during the first trimester of pregnancy, 2) found that there is limited information on the safety or risks of medicines listed as safe on many Web sites used by women, and 3) confirmed a previous finding that women who used opioids in early pregnancy had an increased risk of having a baby with spina bifida.

- Advanced strategies to increase folic acid (a B vitamin) intake among women of reproductive age to prevent neural tube defects (serious birth defects of the brain and spine) in low- and middle-resource countries through NCBDDD’s Birth Defects COUNT. Specifically, NCBDDD collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop tools and strategies for birth defects tracking and prevention in South-East Asia. NCBDDD also provided analytical support to WHO and other partners to help determine the level of folate that should be in a woman’s blood, which is associated with the lowest risk for neural tube defects. This information will help guide countries in setting national prevention goals for neural tube defects.

- Worked to prevent alcohol use during pregnancy and reduce fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) by characterizing the problem, implementing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, and strengthening partnerships to advance practice change. NCBDDD contributed to a CDC Vital Signs report which highlighted binge drinking as a serious, under-recognized problem among adolescent and adult women, and found 1 in 8 women aged 18 years and older binge drink. NCBDDD supported 3 of its Regional Training Centers to integrate alcohol screening and
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brief intervention into clinical practice. NCBDDD supported the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in the production of an FASD Toolkit for providers.

- Leveraged NCBDDD’s birth defects tracking expertise to better understand congenital heart defects (CHD) and newborn screening for critical congenital heart defects (CCHD). NCBDDD launched an innovative new program to monitor CHD among adolescents and adults in 3 sites to understand health issues and needs across the lifespan. NCBDDD also demonstrated that newborn screening for CCHD appears to be a lifesaving and cost-effective way to find some babies with these conditions early so that they can get care and treatment to live and thrive.

- Released important findings about birth defects that will help prioritize future research, improve health outcomes, and plan for services for families affected by birth defects: gastroschisis prevalence doubled from 1995-2005; trisomy conditions, including Down syndrome, increased from 2005-2010 and survival among people with Down syndrome has improved over time; 18% of babies with spina bifida had more than 3 hospital stays initiated in their first year of life; and if women who were obese attained a healthy weight before pregnancy, nearly 3,000 congenital heart defects could be prevented each year in the U.S.

Did You Know?

- In the U.S., a baby is born with a birth defect every 4.5 minutes.¹
- In the U.S., birth defects account for more than 1 of every 5 infant deaths each year.²
- Worldwide, more than 300,000 babies are born with birth defects of the brain and spine (neural tube defects) each year.³
- Birth defects affect us all. See the impact of these common, costly, critical conditions in NCBDDD’s infographic.

Looking to the Future

Our ongoing state-based birth defects tracking system and public health research continue to identify and frame important opportunities to prevent birth defects and help children thrive and improve timely referral to services. By building on these core activities, we’re developing more effective public health strategies to address safer medication use during pregnancy, increase folic acid intake among women of reproductive age, and
prevent alcohol use during pregnancy. And by linking surveillance data with other existing data systems, we’re learning more about longer-term health outcomes and costs of medical care for individuals born with birth defects.

**Notable 2013 Scientific Publications**


References


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http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/aboutus/annualreport2013

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