



## Field Epidemiology Training Program Activities



### What is Birth Defects COUNT?

Birth Defects COUNT (Countries and Organizations United for Neural Tube Defects Prevention) is a global initiative to reduce death and lifelong disability resulting from neural tube defects, which are serious birth defects of the brain and spine. CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities provides scientific and programmatic expertise to expand neural tube defects prevention and strengthen birth defects surveillance worldwide. The initiative builds on the success that folic acid fortification of cereal grain products labeled as enriched has had in many countries. A key strategy of the initiative is to increase folic acid intake among women of reproductive age through fortification to prevent neural tube defects. These efforts can have a significant impact on death and lifelong disability worldwide.

### What is the Field Epidemiology Training Program?

Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) are applied epidemiology training programs offered by CDC to help countries develop, set up and implement dynamic public health strategies to improve and strengthen their public health systems and infrastructures. FETP fellows spend the majority of their two-year tenure in the field conducting epidemiologic investigations and field surveys, and evaluating surveillance systems, among other activities. Fellows can also conduct small projects which focus on topic areas addressing specific country needs. FETPs provide the opportunity for a targeted, tailored approach to enhance birth defects surveillance and prevention at the country level.

### How do Birth Defects COUNT and FETPs work together?

Surveillance provides a foundation for many public health activities, including birth defects prevention. It provides the data necessary to make informed decisions. Surveillance can also provide information about whether intervention efforts are meeting their intended goals. Birth Defects COUNT is working with FETPs in a number of countries across regions to strengthen birth defects surveillance. Specifically, Birth Defects COUNT supports the implementation of and provides scientific technical assistance to several year-long individualized FETP projects in Mexico and Colombia, and is also working to strengthen birth defects surveillance in Africa.



National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities  
Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities



## Overview of Activities

- ***Evaluation of mandatory folic acid supplementation guidelines in Mexico City.***  
FETP fellows are evaluating current knowledge and practice among physicians and women around recommending or using folic acid supplements, and the availability of folic acid supplements at the primary healthcare centers. Results from the evaluation could highlight gaps in knowledge about the importance of folic acid and could also demonstrate whether or not there is sufficient stock of folic acid supplements at the primary healthcare centers.
- ***Evaluation of a neural tube defects surveillance system in Mexico.***  
FETP fellows are assessing the quality of an existing neural tube defects surveillance system. They will evaluate various system attributes and submit recommendations to health officials to improve the neural tube defects surveillance system. Such improvements could lead to more accurate and timely data for planning birth defects prevention efforts.
- ***Implementing a birth defects surveillance system in Riosucio, Caldas, Colombia.***  
FETP fellows are developing a birth defects surveillance system to learn more about the burden of birth defects among children 5 years of age or younger in Riosucio. This information will help local health officials plan prevention efforts as well as help inform future birth defects investigations in the area.
- ***Burden of birth defects in prenatal and neonatal deaths: an analysis of vital statistics.***  
FETP fellows are analyzing the national vital statistics database to estimate prenatal and neonatal deaths due to birth defects, and to explore relationships between maternal risk factors and birth defects. Findings from this investigation will provide health officials with an estimated burden of the effects of and complications related to birth defects in Colombia, and will help inform prevention efforts.
- ***Assessing the prevalence of neural tube defects in Kenya.***  
CDC recently provided technical assistance on the development of a report on the burden of neural tube defects in a Kenyan hospital and on a presentation of findings to country health officials.

## What's Next?

Birth Defects COUNT will continue to collaborate with FETPs to further strengthen birth defects surveillance expertise and capacity at the country level. Efforts will increase the availability of reliable birth defects surveillance data so countries can better define the true burden of neural tube defects, and develop and assess the impact of their prevention activities. Future activities include:

- Provide technical assistance to FETP fellow conducting a comparison of findings from a Kenyan hospital to other hospitals in the region;
- Develop and conduct birth defects surveillance training for FETP fellows and health care professionals, including nurses and community health workers in Kenya;
- Support FETP fellow in Kenya to expand birth defects surveillance activities, including planning and implementing a population-based surveillance system;
- Increase awareness of the need for and use of birth defects surveillance data;
- Garner regional support for FETP activities related to birth defects surveillance to support neural tube defects and other birth defects prevention efforts.

To learn more, please visit [www.cdc.gov/folicacid](http://www.cdc.gov/folicacid)

