



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Birthing Healthy Babies

*National Birth Defects Prevention Month and Folic Acid Awareness Week –
January 2018*

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Kathleen Dooling] 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. Kathleen Dooling.

Birth defects are common, costly, and critical. Dr. Suzanne Gilboa is with CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent birth defects. Welcome to the show, Suzanne.

[Dr. Gilboa] Thank you.

[Dr. Dooling] Suzanne, how many babies are born with birth defects each year?

[Dr. Gilboa] Every four and a half minutes a baby is born with a birth defect in the United States. That means nearly 120,000 babies, or about three percent of all babies born each year.

[Dr. Dooling] What are the most common birth defects?

[Dr. Gilboa] The most common birth defects are congenital heart defects in which there is a structural problem with the baby's heart. These occur in about one percent of babies. Other common birth defects are oral-facial clefts, like cleft lip and cleft palate; neural tube defects, like spina bifida; and Down syndrome, a chromosomal defect.

[Dr. Dooling] What are the causes of birth defects?

[Dr. Gilboa] For most birth defects, we don't know the cause. They are believed to be caused by a mix of factors. These factors include our genes, our behaviors, and the things we interact with in our environment. But we don't yet fully understand how these factors work together to cause birth defects. There are a few things we know increase the risk of birth defects. For example, certain medical conditions, such as being obese or having uncontrolled diabetes before and during pregnancy, smoking cigarettes during pregnancy, and taking certain medications, such as Accutane, a drug used to treat severe acne.

[Dr. Dooling] What can a woman do to increase her chances of having a healthy baby?

[Dr. Gilboa] There are many things a woman can do, before and during pregnancy, to increase her chance of having a healthy baby. Before pregnancy, a woman should get 400 micrograms of folic acid every day, starting at least one month before getting pregnant, to prevent neural tube defects, such as spina bifida. A woman should also talk to a healthcare provider about any medications she is taking or thinking about taking. This includes prescription and over-the-

counter medications and dietary or herbal supplements. A woman should be sure to see her healthcare provider regularly and start prenatal care as early as she thinks she might be pregnant. A woman should also not drink alcohol or smoke during pregnancy. Alcohol can cause fetal alcohol syndrome and smoking can cause oral clefts. A woman can help prevent infections during pregnancy by making sure she has received all recommended vaccinations. Pregnant women are more prone to severe illness from the flu and the flu shot is an important preventive step. In addition, a woman can protect against mosquito-borne infections, such as Zika, by getting rid of standing water around her home, wearing long sleeved shirts and long pants, using insect repellent with EPA-registered active ingredients, and staying in cool and well screened areas. In addition, to prevent contracting cytomegalovirus, or CMV, a woman should reduce contact with the urine of young children.

[Dr. Dooling] What can parents expect if their child is born with a birth defect?

[Dr. Gilboa] Every birth defect is different and this will depend on how severely the baby is affected, but, in general, as medical care and treatment have improved, babies and children with many birth defects are living longer and healthier lives. They often, however, require surgical procedures and may need to be regularly seen by medical specialists throughout childhood and into adulthood. Many people with birth defects live full, independent lives. Some have little or no disability while others might have substantial limitations.

[Dr. Dooling] Where can listeners get more information about preventing birth defects?

[Dr. Gilboa] Listeners can go to nbdpn.org.

[Dr. Dooling] Thanks, Suzanne. I've been talking today with Dr. Suzanne Gilboa about ways to prevent birth defects.

To reduce infections that can affect the health of the baby, get recommended vaccines during pregnancy, avoid insect bites, and reduce contact with the saliva and urine of young children. In addition, all women of childbearing age should consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily to help prevent defects of a baby's brain and spine.

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

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