



# NEWS RELEASE

## St. Charles County Government

Department of Community Health and the Environment

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH DRAWS ATTENTION TO HEALTHY BABIES, MOTHERS

*St. Charles County, Missouri* – One in every 33 babies is born with a birth defect, and these defects account for nearly one in five infant deaths. To help educate mothers on ways they can increase their chances of having a healthy baby and to draw attention to these statistics, January has been declared Birth Defect Prevention Month (<http://www.nbdpn.org/>).

Common birth defects include: heart defects (affects 1 in 100 to 200 births); spine and brain defects (1 in 1,000); cleft lips or cleft palates (1 in 1,000); Down syndrome (1 in 800); and a variety of developmental disabilities. Babies born with these or other abnormalities have a greater chance for illness and long-term disability than others. In addition to health concerns, birth defects may lead to extended hospital stays that result in more than \$2.5 billion in hospital costs annually.

Although some birth defects cannot be prevented, there are several things a woman can do to improve her chances for a healthy pregnancy:

- Eat a proper and balanced diet
- Take a vitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid daily (begin at least one month before pregnancy)
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other toxic substances before and during pregnancy
- Take caution not to eat raw or undercooked meat and avoid unpasteurized milk products
- Avoid raw seafood and fish reported to be high in mercury
- Remain under the guidance of an experienced health care professional and discuss medical concerns, problems and family history with this individual.
- Discuss with a health care provider any medications (including over-the-counter and herbal supplements) taken before or during pregnancy

To help expectant and new mothers, the St. Charles County Division of Public Health's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program offers guidance on proper nutrition at no cost to qualifying participants. This supplemental program provides specific nutritious foods and nutrition education to assist the health of growing families. Statistics show that women who participate in the WIC Program have fewer low birth weight babies, experience fewer infant deaths and eat healthier.

Funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the WIC program is based at the Division of Public Health office at 1650 Boone's Lick Road in St. Charles. In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, the department is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Persons interested in applying for WIC or in need of more information should call (636) 949-7402 or visit [www.scchealth.org](http://www.scchealth.org).

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