



**Commonwealth of Kentucky  
Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Prevent Infections for Kentucky Babies' Protection**

*52 Weeks of Public Health Campaign Spotlight: National Birth Defects Prevention Month*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (January 12, 2018)** - As part of National Birth Defects Prevention Month, the Kentucky Department for Public Health within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services is joining organizations nationwide to increase awareness about how to protect Kentucky babies from being born with birth defects.

The month of January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Every 4.5 minutes, a baby in the United States is born with a birth defect. While not all birth defects can be prevented, women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by preventing infections before and during pregnancy.

The 2018 National Birth Defects Prevention Month theme is "***Prevent to Protect: Prevent Infections for Baby's Protection.***" DPH is encouraging Kentucky women to **Prevent to Protect** by taking the following steps before and during pregnancy:

- **Get vaccinated.**
  - Get the flu shot and the whooping cough vaccine.
  - Become up-to-date with all vaccines before getting pregnant.
- **Prevent insect bites.**
  - Use insect repellent.
  - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
  - Consider avoiding travel to areas with Zika virus.
- **Practice good hygiene.**

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid putting a young child's cup or pacifier in your mouth.
- **Talk to your healthcare provider.**
  - Ask about how you can prevent infections, such as Zika virus.
  - Discuss how to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

By following the **Prevent to Protect** guidelines, Kentucky women can reduce the risk of having a child with a birth defect as well as reduce the risk of pregnancy complications such as early pregnancy loss, prematurity and stillbirths.

“We know that infections are one cause of birth defects. Steps like up-to-date vaccinations, avoiding infections, visiting a healthcare provider well before pregnancy, controlling your weight through healthy diet and activity, and taking a multivitamin every day can go a long way in assuring a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby,” says Dr. Henrietta Bada, MD, MPH Maternal and Child Health Division Director of the Kentucky Department for Public Health.

Each year there are approximately 4,900 babies born with birth defects in Kentucky. Not only can birth defects lead to lifelong challenges and disabilities, but are also a common cause of death in the first year of life. Public awareness, expert medical care, accurate and early diagnosis, and social support systems are all needed for prevention and treatment of these conditions.

The Kentucky Department for Public Health is participating in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by distributing information to women and their health care providers across the state. Efforts throughout the year include distribution of educational materials at health fairs and presentations at state and national conferences.

“DPH is excited to be part of this national campaign. Through our efforts across the country, we plan to reach millions of women and their families with vital prevention information and an opportunity to prevent birth defects.” says Monica Clouse, MPH, Principal Investigator for [Kentucky's Birth Surveillance Registry](#).

The Kentucky Department for Public Health encourages you to be an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month by following “National Birth Defects Prevention Network” on Facebook and retweeting **#Prevent2Protect** on Twitter.

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*The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.*

