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**DOH TO EXPAND BIRTH DEFECTS MONITORING, PREVENTION EFFORTS**  
*--CDC awards DOH Population-based Birth Defects Surveillance Program grant--*

**Tallahassee** – Today, Florida Department of Health (DOH) officials announced that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded a five-year grant to DOH's Division of Environmental Health. The Population-based Birth Defects Surveillance Program grant provides \$180,000 each of the five years for a total of \$900,000. Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, accounting for more than 20 percent of infant deaths during the first year of life.

"This grant recognizes the vital role Florida plays in tracking, investigating and preventing birth defects," said DOH Deputy State Health Officer for Children's Medical Services Elizabeth Ford, M.D., M.B.A. "I am pleased that this funding will allow us to work together with our many partners to prevent birth defects and to reduce morbidity, disability and mortality."

This grant enables DOH to expand its tracking systems and prevention activities, while also providing resources to improve case finding and referring families to services. These activities will be supported through collaborative efforts between the Florida Birth Defects Registry, Children's Medical Services, Maternal and Child Health Programs, and Healthy Start.

In order to reduce the risk for birth defects, women who are trying to get pregnant are encouraged to:

- Go for a pre-pregnancy checkup.
- Seek pre-natal care as soon as they think they may be pregnant.
- Before you plan to conceive, take a vitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet; maintain a healthy weight and exercise.
- Avoid infections and stress.
- Avoid cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs.
- Stay clear of hazardous chemicals.

The Division of Environmental Health currently houses the Florida Birth Defects Registry, which is the central source of information on birth defects in the state. For more information about the registry, visit <http://flbdr.hsc.usf.edu/>.

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