

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Birth Defects Activities

### Birth Defects Basic Facts

- Each year, an estimated 120,000 babies are born with major structural birth defects.
- One in five infant deaths is due to birth defects, making them the leading cause of infant mortality.
- Birth defects of the heart and circulatory system are the most common, affecting roughly 1 in 115 newborns.
- Severe birth defects may require special lifelong medical treatment. Because many conditions cannot be fully corrected, birth defects are a major cause of childhood and adult disability.
- According to CDC the lifetime economic cost of caring for infants born each year with any of the 17 most common birth defects exceeds \$6 billion annually.
- Hospital costs for stays due to birth defects totaled \$2.6 billion for all birth defects and all ages in 2004. More than half of all hospital costs were related to cardiac and circulatory birth defects. Associated costs of physician care and other outpatient medical services are not included in this figure.

### Research

The National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) is funding the largest case-control study of birth defects ever conducted -- the National Birth Defects Prevention Study. The six regional centers located in MA, NC, GA, AR, UT and CA participating in the Study identify infants with major birth defects; interview mothers about medical history, environmental exposures, and lifestyle before and during pregnancy; and collect DNA samples to study gene-environment interactions. For example, the study has interviewed more than 8,500 mothers of infants with congenital heart defects, the most common structural anomaly, and researchers are analyzing data on exposures reported by these mothers to identify potential risk factors. Due to lack of funds, CDC will support only 6 regional centers in FY09 down from a total of 9 in FY08. Moreover, continued under funding prevents the analysis of genetic samples gathered from this study.

### Surveillance

The NCBDDD also funds community-based birth defects surveillance systems, programs to prevent birth defects, and initiatives to improve access to health services for children with birth defects. Surveillance is the backbone of a vital, functional and responsive public health network. Without additional funding, CDC will be forced to reduce the number of states with federal support from 15 to 12 in FY10.

**Preventing costly and sometimes tragic birth defects is an important public health priority that requires a sustained commitment of resources. An increase of \$4.5 million for the Birth Defects General line is needed in FY 2010 to ensure a robust and comprehensive birth defects program at CDC.**

### Prevention

The daily consumption of the vitamin folic acid has been shown to significantly reduce serious birth defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly. Since fortification of U.S. enriched grain products with folic acid, the rate of those birth defects has decreased by 26%. The CDC estimates, however, that up to 70% of neural tube defects could be prevented if all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. To achieve the full prevention potential of folic acid, CDC's national public and health professions education campaign must be expanded.

**A \$2 million increase in FY10 for the Folic Acid Education Campaign is needed to enable CDC to inform more women, particularly non-pregnant Hispanic women and women age 18-24, as well as healthcare providers about the benefits of folic acid.**