



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Folic acid is important for a healthy pregnancy

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Folic acid is a member of the B-vitamin family and plays an important role in healthy cell formation in the developing fetus. For this reason, extra folic acid (400 micrograms or 0.4 milligrams- not to exceed 1 milligram daily) is recommended as part of the healthy diet of any woman considering a pregnancy.

In a fetus the brain and spinal column develop in the first 24-28 days after conception, often before a woman realizes she is pregnant. Sometimes problems occur with brain formation causing neural tube defects .Examples of neural tube defects are an incomplete closure of the spinal column (spina bifida), the absence of a brain (anencephaly), and a malformation of the brain and skull (encephalocele). Studies have shown that folic acid, when taken before a pregnancy occurs, may reduce the risk of neural tube defects by as much as 70 percent.

Data from the PRAMS (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System) survey of the Alabama Department of Public Health was used to evaluate the knowledge of Alabama's mothers concerning the benefits of folic acid. The following are some of the findings:

- In 1999, 79.5 percent of Alabama's mothers had knowledge of folic acid's benefits. Yet in 2001, only 37 percent of women who stated they wanted to become pregnant took a daily multivitamin before pregnancy.
- In 2001, mothers who were 30 or more years of age and stated they wanted to be pregnant were seven times more likely to take a daily vitamin than mothers 10 to 19 years old who wanted to be pregnant.
- In 2001, almost twice as many white mothers took a daily multivitamin as did mothers of black and other races.
- In 2001, only 19.8 percent of mothers on Medicaid took a daily multivitamin, whereas 42.5 percent of mothers not on Medicaid took a daily multivitamin.

PRAMS data indicate that Alabama mothers' knowledge of folic acid for a healthy pregnancy is not being translated into action. Bill Lateulere, State Director of the Alabama Chapter of March of Dimes, says, "In Alabama the importance of folic acid in a healthy diet is on par with the national average, however the 2003 March of Dimes Gallup Poll confirms the Health Statistics findings that we have a long way to go to turn knowledge into behavior change."

This information is available in a fact sheet produced by Alabama PRAMS which is on the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site ([www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org)). Additional copies can be obtained by contacting Carol Ann Dagostin, PRAMS research analyst, at (334) 206-2752.

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