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PALM BEACH COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLIC ACID

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL— The Palm Beach County Health Department in conjunction with the National Council on Folic Acid celebrates National Folic Acid Awareness Week (January 4 - 10) to increase awareness of the importance of this crucial nutrient. Folic acid is a B-vitamin that is necessary for proper cell growth. If taken before and during early pregnancy either from a multi-vitamin or fortified foods, folic acid can prevent from 50% up to 70% of some forms of serious birth defects of the brain and spine.

Although all enriched cereals and grain products in the U.S. are fortified with the B-vitamin folic acid, only one-third of U.S. women of childbearing age consume the recommended amount. Taking a multivitamin with folic acid every day is a key way that women can get the recommended amount of 400 mcg (micrograms).

Fifty percent of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Many of the 65 million women of childbearing age are in the dark about what they need to do before they become pregnant to guard against birth defects. The latest information on folic acid research is readily available on a new web site www.folicacidinfo.org to educate women and their families about the benefits of this vitamin in reducing neural tube birth defects such as Spina Bifida.

“Women especially need folic acid, even if not planning to become pregnant, since half of all pregnancies are not planned,” said Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Outreach Coordinator Janice Campbell. “In addition, Hispanic babies are 1.5 to 2 times more likely than others in the United States to be born with a neural tube defect (NTD) such as Spina Bifida.” The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that Latinas in the United States consume the least amount of folic acid and have the least knowledge about folic acid among racial or ethnic groups in this country

Campbell also advises:

- Taking a multivitamin with folic acid every day.
- Eat fortified and enriched foods such as grains, pastas, or breakfast cereals
- Get regular prenatal care beginning in your first trimester of pregnancy
- Eat a variety of foods as part of a healthy diet

Taking a simple quiz at www.folicacidinfo.org will increase your knowledge of folic acid. You can also download fact sheets or access links to more resources on this beneficial B-vitamin. Information is available in English and Spanish.

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