

## Help prevent birth defects during prenatal visits

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Pediatricians are important messengers about sources of birth defects, from genetics and the environment to medication use, infectious diseases and lifestyle factors.

The prenatal visit provides an opportunity for pediatricians to address parents' concerns about birth defects and review social determinants of health that contribute to birth defects, according to *Bright Futures* (<http://brightfutures.aap.org>).

Pediatricians also can identify and help prevent poor outcomes from birth defects in the newborn period. At the first newborn visit, pediatricians should follow up on newborn screening, including critical congenital heart disease if the baby was born at home or a birth center. Review newborn metabolic screening results in the first week, retest and refer patients with abnormal results, and follow up on abnormal screening results in the first months. Children also should receive lead screening at six months, if indicated.

Helping mothers identify what is best for them and their babies also is the goal of National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Resources are available at <https://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm.php>.

Following are tips for pregnant mothers:

- Take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
- Visit your health care provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
- Be up-to-date with all vaccines, including the influenza vaccine.
- Try to reach a healthy weight before you get pregnant.
- Avoid harmful substances like alcohol, tobacco and other drugs during pregnancy.

Moms can sign up for free text messages on how to have a healthy pregnancy customized to their due date by texting BABY or BEBE (Spanish) to 511411 or visiting <https://www.Text4Baby.org>.



