January 14, 2019

Dear Healthcare Providers:

The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) to raise awareness of birth defects and to promote strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications during National Birth Defects Prevention Month in January. The theme for 2019 is “Best for You. Best for Baby.”

Birth defects are the second-leading cause of infant deaths in Indiana. Congenital malformations — such as cardiovascular, chromosomal, central nervous system and musculoskeletal defects — contributed to nearly one in five infant deaths in Indiana in 2017. There are about 2,500 babies born in Indiana with birth defects each year.

Babies who survive and live with birth defects are at an increased risk for developing many lifelong physical, cognitive and social challenges. We know that not all birth defects can be prevented, but we also know that women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant.

Please encourage all pregnant women and those who may become pregnant to:
- Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
- Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.
- Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.
- Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.
- Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

The attached digital toolkit contains information, resources, and links to free educational materials from ISDH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN). We encourage you to use these materials to raise awareness of the ways birth defects can be prevented among health professionals and the general public in your community.

You have the power to make a difference. We urge you to join us as an active participant in National Birth Defects Prevention Month - 2019 and to continue your efforts throughout the year.

Yours in health,

Kristina M. Box, MD, FACOG
State Health Commissioner

Enclosure