News Release

Shelby County Health Department
814 Jefferson Avenue., Memphis, TN 38105

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FOLIC AWARENESS WEEK

MEMPHIS, TN – The Shelby County Health Department and the National Council on Folic Acid recognize **January 8-14, 2012** as **National Folic Acid Awareness Week**. The purpose of this health observance is to reduce preventable birth defects by recommending that women of childbearing age have a daily intake of 400 micrograms of folic acid. **To increase awareness of the importance of folic acid, the Shelby County Health Department's Family Planning staff will give out free multi-vitamins containing folic acid to women of child-bearing age in the lobby of the Health Department at 814 Jefferson Avenue on Thursday, January 12, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

Research findings indicate that folic acid is necessary for normal development of the neural tube that forms a baby's brain and spinal cord. Because the neural tube is completely formed 26 to 28 days after conception, inadequate amounts of folic acid a month before conception and during early pregnancy can cause defects such as partial or complete absence of the baby's brain (anencephaly), or an opening in the tube resulting in spinal cord and fluid abnormalities (spina bifida), or the production of excessive fluid on the baby's brain (hydrocephaly).

Each year spina bifida and anencephaly occur in approximately 1.3 per 10,000 live births in Tennessee. Although the total number of infants affected is low, the devastation to the family and the cost for multiple surgeries makes these birth defects especially tragic, since an estimated 50% of the cases could have been prevented with adequate intake of folic acid starting before pregnancy.

Folic acid is a B-vitamin that can be found in some enriched foods. In 1996, the Food and Drug Administration required that grain products such as bread, flour, cornmeal, rice, noodles, macaroni, and cereals be fortified with foliate. Naturally occurring folic acid is also found in foods such as dark green leafy vegetables, dried beans, and citrus fruit and juices.

Since approximately 50% of pregnancies in the United States are unintended, it is recommended that adolescents and women capable of becoming pregnant start the folic acid habit early by taking multiple vitamins every day even if they plan to get pregnant later. Eating an adequate diet and taking a multivitamin every day is the key to reducing the risk of neural tube defect in the event of an expected or unexpected pregnancy. Start the New Year off right with a daily multivitamin!

For more information about folic acid and Folic Acid Awareness Week, call the Shelby County Health Department's Family Planning Program at (901) 222-9527 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday.