



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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ST. MARY'S COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT AWARDED MARCH OF DIMES COMMUNITY GRANT

LEONARDTOWN, MD (February 27, 2008) -- The Saint Mary's County Health Department has been awarded a \$10,000 community grant by the March of Dimes Maryland State Chapter. The health department will use the award money to fund a new program, *One Multi-Vitamin Daily = One Health Baby*, aimed at educating, informing, and advising women of childbearing age about the importance of taking multi-vitamins with folic acid, before and during pregnancy.

Having folic acid in a woman's system at conception is an important ingredient for a healthy baby. Brain and spinal cord defects are most likely to develop in the first month of pregnancy, most often before a woman knows she is pregnant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reports that about half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, however, leaving little opportunity to increase folic acid in a woman's body before conception.

"By taking one multi-vitamin with folic acid daily, women of childbearing age can help prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord," noted Libby Wright, RN, MSN, community health nurse program manager at the health department. "Folic acid helps to prevent these birth

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defects if taken before conception and during early pregnancy.”

According to Wright, the grant, one of 12 awarded in the state, has the potential to significantly impact the health of mothers and babies in St. Mary's County. *One Multi-Vitamin = One Healthy Baby* will educate women about the positive benefits of taking folic acid during their child bearing years, not only for the health of their babies, but also for the protection folic acid provides in preventing heart disease, cervical and colon cancer, and possibly, breast cancer.

The Health Department will be distributing gift bags and stepping up education about the importance of taking folic acid at its Family Planning and Reproductive Health, Teen and Detention Center Clinics this spring and summer. The gifts will include multi-vitamins, as well as literature on getting ready for pregnancy, birth and parenting. For more information about the *One Multi-Vitamin = One Healthy Baby program*, please call St. Mary's County Health Department at 301-475-4951

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