

Knowledge of folic acid increases among Hispanic women in North Carolina

North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign releases results of evaluation survey

Raleigh, NC (January 9, 2009) – New research from the North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign (NCFAC) shows that knowledge of multivitamins and folic acid is increasing among Hispanic women in North Carolina. Between 2006 and 2008, the Campaign studied the knowledge, beliefs and behaviors of Hispanic women with regards to multivitamins and folic acid in a scientific statewide evaluation.

Nationally and within North Carolina, Hispanic women are twice as likely to have a baby born with a birth defect of the brain (anencephaly) or spine (spina bifida) as other racial/ethnic groups. Historic research shows that up to 70 percent of birth defects of the brain and spine, known as neural tube defects (NTD), may be prevented with adequate folic acid intake before and during pregnancy. Folic acid is a water-soluble B-vitamin found in multivitamins and fortified foods.

In 2006, the NCFAC did a preliminary survey with foreign-born Hispanic women ages 18-35 in 12 randomly selected counties throughout the state. Between May 2006 and May 2008, the North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign and the March of Dimes implemented a multi-faceted educational campaign to promote multivitamin use. All 12 counties participated in a paid media campaign consisting of a mix of Spanish-language television, radio and newspaper advertising and publicity. In addition, the six intervention counties received public health care provider education, cultural awareness information about Hispanics, and a lay health educator program. In 2008, the NCFAC completed a second survey to measure the success of the campaign.

From 2006 to 2008, knowledge of multivitamins and folic acid increased significantly in North Carolina Hispanic women ages 18 to 35, but overall still remains low.

“This is good news for the Hispanic community. We must continue to work with public health care providers, grass roots community members and organizations, as well as the media, to increase the consumption of multivitamins,” said Amy Mullenix, MSW, MSPH, statewide coordinator of the Campaign. “Now that Hispanic women understand the importance multivitamins and folic acid, we need to work together to encourage all women to take a multivitamin with folic acid every day.”

According to the survey results, myths about multivitamins persist. Many Hispanic women still believe that multivitamins are expensive and can cause weight gain or increase their appetite, even though these myths are untrue. Fortunately, many knew the best time to start taking a multivitamin is at the start of menstruation (menarche).

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The increase of knowledge among Hispanic women in North Carolina over the last two years is encouraging; however, NTD rates are still twice as high for Hispanics. Data from the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics show that between 2001 and 2005 the Hispanic NTD prevalence was 11.8/10,000 live births compared to 5.8 per 10,000 for non-Hispanic whites and 6.2 per 10,000 live births for non-Hispanic blacks.

The North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign will continue to address this disparity in the Hispanic community. In 2009, the NCFAC will begin to implement programming changes to the Latino campaign to reflect the current research. The NCFAC work in the following key areas:

- Continue the Lay Health Education program in partnership with specific agencies in high risk areas across the state;
- Continue to provide cultural awareness programs with public health care agencies, teaching more about the culture and values of the Hispanic community and how they relate to preventative health care;
- Revise and adjust advertising messages for radio, television and in newspaper;
- Redesign the Getfolic.com website for Spanish-speaking women;
- Continue to provide health education to community members, community agencies, and public health care agencies that focus on preventing neural tube defect-affected pregnancies in the Hispanic community.

For more information about the results of this survey, please contact Leslie deRosset, MPH at 919-424-2149 or lderosset@marchofdimes.com. The North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign, a collaboration between the North Carolina Folic Acid Council and the March of Dimes, uses innovative initiatives to educate women about the benefits of folic acid and the birth defects it helps to prevent. Membership in our Council is free. Visit www.getfolic.com for more information.

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About the North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign

The North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign is a statewide program whose mission is to improve health by promoting the benefits and consumption of folic acid by taking a daily multivitamin. Established in 1994, the program advocates that all women of child bearing age take 400 mcg of folic acid daily to help prevent neural tube defects (NTDs). Through its collaboration and partnership, the March of Dimes and the North Carolina Folic Acid Council have made significant progress in the campaign to reduce NTDs. To learn more, visit www.getfolic.com and www.marchofdimes.com.

About the March of Dimes

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide and its premier event, March for Babies, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies. For the latest resources and information, visit marchofdimes.com or nacersano.org.