



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

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KAREN REMLEY, MD, MBA, FAAP  
STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

September 22, 2010

Dear Colleague,

Occasionally in medicine a simple, inexpensive intervention can make a big difference in health outcomes. One such action cuts across medical specialties and practices: the promotion of daily folic acid intake by girls and women. **By educating girls and women ages 15 to 44 to take a daily multiple vitamin containing 400 micrograms of folic acid, you can help decrease prematurity and neural tube defects in Virginia.**

Each year in Virginia, there are over 11,000 babies born preterm and 60 neural tube defects such as spina bifida and anencephalus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 50% to 70% of neural tube birth defects could be prevented with folic acid supplementation. Preconceptual folic acid supplementation has also been associated with a 50% to 70% reduction in the incidence of early spontaneous preterm birth. Studies suggest folic acid may also help prevent other birth defects, including cleft lip and palate.

To be effective, folic acid needs to be taken at least one month prior to conception and through the initial 4 to 6 weeks of pregnancy. Over 40% of pregnancies in Virginia are unplanned, so it is important for all women and girls to adopt the simple habit of taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid.

**I am asking you to consider incorporating the following into your clinical practice:**

- **Encourage all women and girls ages 15 to 44 to take a daily multiple vitamin that includes 400 mcg of folic acid. Nearly all multiple vitamins contain adequate folic acid.**
- **Evaluate women and girls who have already had a neural tube defect-affected pregnancy for a short course of higher dose folic acid as recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service.**  
**<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/recommendations.html>**

Medicaid and FAMIS will cover over-the-counter multiple vitamins with folic acid and waive the co-payment for children and pregnant women. See the DMAS Pharmacy Provider manual (page 11) for specifics: [http://websrvr.dmas.virginia.gov/ProviderManuals/ManualChapters/RX/chapterIV\\_rx.pdf](http://websrvr.dmas.virginia.gov/ProviderManuals/ManualChapters/RX/chapterIV_rx.pdf)

This simple action is a powerful tool in our fight against birth defects, prematurity and infant mortality. Together, we can make a difference!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Remley".

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP