

Birth Defects and Infant Mortality

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant



Birth defects occur in about 1 in 33 births each year in the United States. A birth defect is defined as an abnormality of structure, function or metabolism at birth that results in physical or mental disabilities or death. Thousands of birth defects have been identified, but the causes for them are about 70 percent unknown. Birth defects are the leading cause of death during infancy.

In Kansas in 2008, 303 infant deaths occurred for a rate of 7.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Non-Hispanic Black infant death rate was 13.3 which is 2.1 times higher than non-Hispanic Whites with a rate of 6.2 (Kansas Summary of Vital Statistics, 2008). Of the 303 infant deaths in Kansas, 77 (25.4 percent) were caused by congenital anomalies.

Are there any public health remedies available for any of the known contributing risk factors for birth defects? Yes, there are some environmental risk factors that contribute to birth defects.

There are some strategies for consideration to implement. Teach women:

- To avoid known teratogens such as alcohol, certain prescription medications, various chemicals and illegal drugs.
- About infections (e.g., CMV) as well as sexually transmitted infections (chlamydia, HIV/AIDS, etc.)
- How each can be managed/treated during pregnancy to reduce the risk of having a baby with a birth defect.

For more information on birth defects and their impact on infant mortality visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

Every year on September 9 at 9 a.m., communities across the United States and some parts of the world, ring bells, sound alarms and generally create a clamor to bring attention to the issue of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) prevention. Awareness can be raised about the plight of individuals and families that struggle daily with various disabilities that are caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy.



FASD is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. The effects may include physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.

Each year in the United States, as many as 40,000

babies are born with a FASD. There are about 1,000–6,000 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), the most severe form of FASD. Resulting in a cost to the nation of about six billion a year.

Women need to be aware there is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy. FASD, including its worst expression FAS, are directly caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy. It is a 100 percent preventable condition.

If you are planning any FASD prevention activities, please contact Joe Kotsch, KDHE and he will share your event as part of what Kansas is doing with the National Association of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders State Coordinators (NAFSC) during the quarterly meeting.

For more information on activities you can conduct in your locality visit www.fasday.com.