



COMMUNICATION

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Contact: Namitha Chabilal, IALCH, ext 2341

INKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI CENTRAL HOSPITAL

WORLD BIRTH DEFECTS DAY

Hear our call for More Prevention, Research and Care for Individuals with Birth Defects

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa – Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (IALCH) joins nearly 200 national and global organizations in observing the sixth annual **World Birth Defects Day (WBDD) on March 3, 2020**. Launched in 2015, the WBDD movement aims to raise awareness around the serious global issue of birth defects and to urge improved surveillance, research, prevention, and care for affected individuals and families.

An estimated 8 million babies around the world are born with a **serious birth defect** each year. In South Africa, 1 in 15 live births are affected, equating to 70 000 births every year. Birth defects are a leading cause of death in the first year of life, and babies who survive may have physical or intellectual disabilities, taking a costly toll on their families, communities and nations.

As part of the **development of genetic services in KZN**, the genetics team at IALCH is partnering with local, national and international government, academic and patient organisations to improve prevention, early diagnosis and care for patients and families affected by birth defects.

We will be hosting an **awareness and information event at IALCH on 3rd March 2020, from 10.30 – 12.00 noon**, and are delighted to be welcoming guest speakers Mrs Otty Mhlongo (Deputy Director – PMTCT) who will be talking about DOH Initiatives to Prevent Birth Defects in KZN and Dr Helen Malherbe (Chair of Genetic Alliance – SA, post-doctoral researcher at KRISP, UKZN) will be providing information and an update on the information and support available for families. Please join us to hear more about these exciting initiatives that are taking place in KZN, and across South Africa.

Important steps women can take to improve the chances of a healthy pregnancy and reduce the risk of birth defects include:





- **Start taking a daily multivitamin containing 400 mcg of folic acid**, a B vitamin, even if you're not trying to get pregnant. Folic acid every day, beginning 3 months before pregnancy and continuing through your pregnancy, is proven to help prevent serious birth defects of the brain and spine. It's also a good idea to eat foods that contain folate, the natural form of folic acid, including lentils, green leafy vegetables, black beans, and orange juice.
- **Get as healthy as possible before pregnancy.** See your health care provider for a check-up to learn about any conditions that can be treated before you get pregnant.
- **Be up-to-date with your vaccinations (shots).** Talk to your healthcare provider about vaccinations you should receive before or during pregnancy, including rubella and influenza (flu).
- **Learn how to avoid:** Flu virus, cytomegalovirus (CMV), HIV and other sexually transmitted infections that can harm you and a developing baby. Alcohol and recreational drugs must also be avoided during pregnancy. **Remember: no amount of alcohol is safe in pregnancy!**
- **Practice good hygiene:** Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before preparing or eating foods; after being around or touching pets and other animals. If you're around young children, don't share food, glasses or utensils and do not put a child's cup or pacifier in your mouth.
- **Ask your doctor to review any medicines you are taking before trying to become pregnant:** A healthy mother is important for a baby to develop normally in the womb. Women who need to take medicine regularly may need to continue treatment throughout pregnancy – but some medicines can be harmful to a baby in the womb if taken during pregnancy. Your doctor may advise you to change to another medicine if you are planning a pregnancy. Make sure to have a check-up BEFORE you try to conceive. Tell your doctor straight away if you are taking medicines and become pregnant unexpectedly. Do not stop your medicines without first talking to your doctor.

Join us at the IALCH event on WBBDD 3 March to learn more or join the global WBBDD via the Buzz Day on Twitter, using hashtag **#WorldBDDay**. To learn more about policies, resources, and research on the causes of birth defects, prevention efforts, ways to improve the care of affected children and adults, and how you can get involved in the WBBDD movement visit www.worldbirthdefectsday.org

