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NEWS RELEASE

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Week of January 8th Recognizes Importance of Dietary Folic Acid *Vitamin B Critical in Reducing Neural Tube Defects in Fetal Development*

Everyone needs folic Acid, an essential B-vitamin, in order to maintain good health, but it's particularly important to woman during their childbearing years, according to Dr. Gayle D. Jones, Director of the Oneida County Health Department in recognizing January 8th-14th as *National Folic Acid Awareness Week*.

"Since 50-70 percent of pregnancies are unplanned, women should take 400 mcg. of folic acid each day throughout their childbearing years, even if they are not planning to get pregnant," Jones said. She added, *"It's also important to remember that some women, particularly Latinas, are at higher risk for birth defects involving the brain and spine since their normal dietary consumption of folic acid is lower than that non-Hispanic women."* Jones stressed that defects attributed to a lack of folic acid often occur during the first weeks of fetal development before a woman knows she's pregnant. The most common neural tube defects, or NTDs, are spina bifida and anencephaly.

Folic acid is a synthetic form of folate which occurs naturally in foods like leafy vegetables, beans, liver and some fruits and is a fundamental building block in genetic material production and necessary for cell growth. Many people believe that their folic acid requirements are met because they eat a healthy diet. However, 50 to 90 percent of food folate is destroyed during cooking so supplemental folic acid as part of a multivitamin is recommended. Since folic acid is water soluble and passes through the body very quickly, a daily dose of 400 mcg. is recommended.

Since 1998, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has fortified grain and cereal products with folic acid in order to reduce neural tube defects in newborns, but this measure has not been enough to protect all women and their potential children.

"Women who may become pregnant should be prepared by taking folic acid everyday which can reduce the risk of birth defects involving the brain and spine by up to 70 percent," Jones said.

For more information about the importance of folic acid, talk to your healthcare provider or visit the health department web site at ocgov.net/oneida/health.

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