

Difference in Lives of Arkansans: Birth Defects Surveillance, Research, and Prevention

Collectively the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention, the Arkansas Reproductive Health Monitoring System (ARHMS), and the Arkansas Folic Acid Coalition have had and will continue to have an enormous impact on the lives of Arkansans. The Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention searches for the causes of birth defects, giving us hope that one day birth defects can be prevented and fewer families will know the heartache that comes with learning that a baby has a serious birth defect. ARHMS is continually monitoring the incidences of birth defects in our state's newborn babies so that we know at any given time if the prevalence of a specific birth defect is rising or falling. The Arkansas Folic Acid Coalition is spreading the message to all Arkansans that folic acid supplementation among women of child bearing age is essential as research has shown that it can reduce the chances of a mother delivering a baby with neural tube defects (a disorder involving incomplete development of the brain, spinal cord, and/or their protective coverings) such as spina bifida and anencephaly.

For more than 25 years, ARHMS has served the state by tracking diagnoses of birth defects among Arkansas babies and using scientific research to help further prevent these conditions from affecting families throughout the state. In 1997, ARHMS received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention. The Center uses data from ARHMS to conduct research to help further prevent these conditions from affecting families throughout the state. Additionally, the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention is the lead organization facilitating the activities of the Arkansas Folic Acid Coalition which encourages women to consume folic acid to prevent neural tube defects.

ARHMS data has tracked decreased incidences of spina bifida and anencephaly since measures have been in place to increase folic acid intake among women of childbearing age. An estimated 15 cases of neural tube defects, a severely life-threatening and disabling condition, have been prevented each year in the state since these preventative measures were put in place. On average, 35 babies are currently born each year in Arkansas with neural tube defects (spina bifida is the most prevalent). Since the folic acid campaign began in 1995, the average number of neural tube defect births has dropped by approximately one-third. Neural tube defect prevention measures have saved the state and Arkansas families more than \$11 million annually.

We should all be proud not only that these programs are housed on our campus under the direction of Charlotte Hobbs, MD, PhD, but that work done right here touches the lives of so many families and offers hope for a brighter future.



Established in 1989, Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute provides an on-site research environment for faculty of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences working on the Arkansas Children's Hospital campus. Over 120 pediatric researchers with expertise and experience that span the breadth of medical disciplines comprise ACHRI's roster of investigators who work to fulfill its mission to improve children's health, development, and well-being through high quality research. For more information, visit <http://achri.archildrens.org>.