

# Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) – Folic Acid Module



## Program description

The Birth Defect Prevention and Surveillance program is housed in the Maternal and Child Health Section of the Bureau of Community Health Promotion and is part of the Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) program. Birth defects surveillance includes an active Council on Birth Defect Prevention and Surveillance, a web-based Wisconsin Birth Defects Registry (WBDR), and referral and follow-up activities through the Regional CYSHCN Centers. The program also develops and carries out selected activities each fiscal year aimed at prevention, outreach and education. For more information on the Council or prevention activities, including folic acid initiatives, contact Peggy Helm-Quest, MEd, MHSA, at 608-267-2945 or by email at [Peggy.HelmQuest@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Peggy.HelmQuest@dhs.wisconsin.gov).

For more information on the WBDR or supplemental data, contact Elizabeth Oftedahl, MPH, at 608-261-9304 or by email at [Elizabeth.Oftedahl@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Oftedahl@dhs.wisconsin.gov).

## Demographics of population served

The U.S. Public Health Service recommended in September 1992 that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms of folic acid (one of the B vitamins) daily to reduce their risk of having a pregnancy affected with spina bifida or another neural tube defect (NTD). Since the neural tube forms very early in the pregnancy before a woman knows she is pregnant, it is vitally important that folic acid consumption occurs as a daily habit for every woman of child-bearing age whether she is actively trying to become pregnant or not. Each year spina bifida and anencephaly, the two most common forms of neural tube defects, occur in approximately 1 of every 1,000 pregnancies in the United States. In Wisconsin, for the ten year period 1997 to 2006, there were 166 cases of spina bifida and 61 cases of anencephaly reported. Spina bifida is a condition in which the spinal cord is exposed. A majority of children born with spina bifida grow to adulthood with varying degrees of disability. In anencephaly, children die shortly after birth because most or all of the brain is absent.

## Data description

Established in 1984 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a state-based system of health surveys that collects information on health risk behaviors, preventive health practices, and health care access primarily related to chronic disease and injury. Currently, data are collected monthly in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. More than 350,000 adults are interviewed each year, making the BRFSS the largest telephone health survey in the world. States use BRFSS data to identify emerging health problems, establish and track health objectives, and develop and evaluate public health policies and programs.

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) offered a folic acid module beginning in 1994. Wisconsin has included the module periodically in the state BRFSS survey.

## Folic acid module questions

1. Do you currently take any vitamin pills or supplements?
2. Are any of these a multivitamin?
3. Do any of the vitamin pills or supplements you take contain folic acid?
4. How often do you take this vitamin pill or supplement?
5. Some health experts recommend that women take 400 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid, for which one of the following reasons:
  - To make strong bones
  - To prevent birth defects
  - To prevent high blood pressure
  - Some other reason
  - Do not know / Not sure

*(The correct answer is "To prevent birth defects")*

## Folic acid module responses

1. Do you currently take any vitamin pills or supplements?

	2000	2001	2002	2004	2006
Yes	57.6%	56.4%	57.3%	60.7%	58.3%
No	42.3%	43.5%	42.7%	39.2%	41.7%
Don't Know/Not Sure	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

2. Are any of these a multivitamin?

	2000	2001	2002	2004	2006
Yes	80.1%	81.7%	80.8%	84.6%	85.6%
No	19.2%	17.6%	18.0%	14.5%	13.7%
Don't Know/Not Sure	0.7%	0.8%	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%

3. Do any of the vitamin pills or supplements you take contain folic acid?

	2000	2001	2002	2004	2006
Yes	19.9%	23.1%	22.4%	18.3%	24.2%
No	60.9%	54.2%	49.4%	58.8%	52.4%
Don't Know/Not Sure	19.2%	22.8%	28.3%	22.6%	23.4%

4. How often do you take this vitamin pill or supplement?

	2000	2001	2002	2004	2006
1+ Times Per Day	86.6%	86.9%	86.9%	89.8%	81.9%
1+ Times Per Week	12.0%	11.8%	10.6%	8.5%	11.6%
1+ Times Per Month	1.4%	1.3%	2.4%	1.0%	6.1%
Don't Know/Not Sure	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.8%	0.5%

5. Some health experts recommend that women take 400 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid, for which one of the following reasons:

	2000	2001	2002	2004	2006
Make strong bones	14.7%	14.8%	14.3%	12.6%	15.1%
Prevent birth defects	31.7%	35.8%	33.5%	37.1%	37.8%
Prevent high blood pressure	4.8%	5.5%	6.1%	4.6%	6.1%
Some other reason	19.4%	19.5%	18.3%	18.0%	15.7%
Don't know/Not Sure/Refused	29.4%	24.4%	27.8%	27.8%	25.2%

## Discussion

The BRFSS folic acid module responses suggest some areas for education and/or intervention.

- Only about three out of five women respondents say they currently take vitamins or supplements.
- About four in five of those taking a vitamin or supplement say that at least one of the vitamins or supplements is a multivitamin.
- About one in five of those taking a vitamin or supplement say that at least one of the vitamins or supplements contains folic acid.
- Eight or nine out of ten of those taking a vitamin or supplement take at least one per day.
- Only about a third of the women respondents knew that folic acid prevents birth defects.

**For more information:**

**Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/index.htm>

**Additional Resources:**

**Bureau of Community Health Promotion (BCHP) Websites**

**Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Program**

[http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH\\_BFCH/MCH/index.htm](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH_BFCH/MCH/index.htm)

**Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program**

[http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH\\_BFCH/cshcn/index.HTM](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH_BFCH/cshcn/index.HTM)

**Birth Defect Prevention and Surveillance Program**

[http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH\\_BFCH/cshcn/bdpsdesc/bdpssystem.htm](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/DPH_BFCH/cshcn/bdpsdesc/bdpssystem.htm)

**Council on Birth Defect Prevention and Surveillance**

<http://www.cb dps.state.wi.us/INDEX.HTML>

**Regional CYSHCN Centers**

**Northern Regional CYSHCN Center**

Marathon County Health Department, 1200 Lake View Dr., Rm. 200, Wausau, WI 54403-6797

Phone: 715/ 261-1900 Fax: 715/ 261-1901 Toll-Free: 1 866/ 640-4106

Website: [www.co.marathon.wi.us/cyshcn.asp](http://www.co.marathon.wi.us/cyshcn.asp)

**Northeastern Regional CYSHCN Center**

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin-Fox Valley, 325 N. Commercial St., Ste. 400, Neenah, WI 54956

Phone: 920/ 969-5325 Fax: 920/ 969-7975 Toll-Free: 1 877/ 568-5205

Website: [www.northeastregionalcenter.org](http://www.northeastregionalcenter.org)

**Southern Regional CYSHCN Center**

Waisman Center, 1500 Highland Ave., Rm. 102, Madison, WI 53705-2280

Phone: 608/ 265-8610 Fax: 608/ 265-3441 Toll-Free: 1 800/ 532-3321

Website: [www.waisman.wisc.edu/ciu/cshcn/index.html](http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/ciu/cshcn/index.html)

**Southeastern Regional CYSHCN Center**

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, PO Box 1997 - MS 939, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1997

Phone: 414/ 266-6333 Fax: 414/ 266-2225 Toll-Free: 1 800/ 234-5437 (1 800/ 234-KIDS)

Website: [www.southeastregionalcenter.org](http://www.southeastregionalcenter.org)

**Western Regional CYSHCN Center**

Chippewa County Department of Public Health, 711 N. Bridge St., Rm 222, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Phone: 715/ 726-7900 Fax: 715/ 726-7910 Toll-Free: 1 800/ 400-3678 (1 800/ 400-FORU)

Website: [www.co.chippewa.wi.us/ccdph/cyshcn/](http://www.co.chippewa.wi.us/ccdph/cyshcn/)

**CYSHCN Statewides and Collaborating Partners**

**ABC for Health, Inc.**

32 N. Bassett St., Madison, WI 53703-2606

Phone: 608/ 261-6939 Fax: 608/ 261-6938 Toll-Free: 1 800/ 585-4222

Website: [www.abcforhealth.org](http://www.abcforhealth.org) / [www.healthwatchwisconsin.org](http://www.healthwatchwisconsin.org)

**ABC for Rural Health**

100 Polk County Plaza, Ste. 18, Balsam Lake, WI 54810

Phone: 715/ 485-8525 Fax: 715/ 485-8501

**CYSHCN Oral Health Project**

Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin, 620 S. 76<sup>th</sup> St., Ste. 120, Milwaukee, WI 53214  
Phone: 414/ 292-4015 Fax: 414/ 231-4972  
Website: [www.chawisconsin.org](http://www.chawisconsin.org)

**Family Voices of Wisconsin**

P.O. Box 55029, Madison, WI 53705  
Phone: 608/ 239-1364 / 608/ 233-3726  
Website: [www.wfv.org](http://www.wfv.org)

**Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council**

P.O. Box 9, Lac du Flambeau, WI 54538  
Phone: 715/ 588-3324 Fax: 715/ 588-7900  
Website: [www.glitc.org](http://www.glitc.org)

**Parent to Parent of Wisconsin**

Family Resource Connection, 1020 Kabel Ave., Rhinelander, WI 54501  
Phone: 715/ 361-2890 Fax: 715/ 361-2892  
Website: [www.familyresourceconnection.org](http://www.familyresourceconnection.org)

**Wisconsin First Step**

c/o Gunderson Lutheran Medical Center, 1900 South Ave., LaCrosse, WI 54601-9980  
Phone: 608/ 775-5586 Fax: 608/ 775-4766 Toll-Free: 1 800/ 642-7837 (1-800/ 642-STEP)  
Website: [www.mch-hotlines.org](http://www.mch-hotlines.org)