

MEDICAID IMPLEMENTS POLICY CHANGES TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF PREGNANT WOMEN AND DECREASE COSTS

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DENVER – November 4, 2009 – The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing announced today that Medicaid has improved access to prenatal vitamins and folic acid. As of November 1, 2009, pregnant woman on Medicaid can fill prescriptions for prenatal vitamins and folic acid without the need for a prior authorization. Pregnant women, and women under the age of 18, do not have a copay for prenatal vitamins or folic acid. Women over the age of 18 and who are not pregnant must pay \$1 for generic and \$3 for brand name vitamins.

Medicaid enrollment is at an all-time high of 481,549 clients – an 88,000 increase since January 2007. The department is committed to improving the health of Medicaid clients and containing costs. Decreasing the barriers to obtaining preventive care, such as prenatal vitamins, increases the likelihood of the birth of healthy babies that become healthy adolescents and adults.

“Research has shown that prenatal vitamins, specifically folic acid, are essential to the proper development of a growing fetus,” says Sandeep Wadhwa, MD, state Medicaid director. “Since folic acid is most effective during the first 28 days after conception, the department is encouraging all women of child bearing age to ask their doctor about prescriptions for these vitamins.”

Prenatal vitamins contain three supplements that are essential to the proper development of a growing fetus: folic acid, calcium and iron. This combination of supplements is not only healthy for women preparing to give birth, but also aids in maintaining overall health and well-being for all women.

Folic acid, a form of Vitamin B, plays an important role in the production of normal red blood cells and can help prevent conditions such as anemia. Folic acid is also helpful in the prevention of serious birth defects to the fetus’ developing spinal cord and brain, called the neural tube.

Defects to the neural tube most commonly occur during the first 28 days after conception, before most women know they are pregnant. Studies have shown that including folic acid in the diet before and during pregnancy significantly reduces the prospect of damage to the neural tube, thus decreases the likelihood of a birth defect.

Calcium has many functional attributes, but most of its use goes to maintaining and supporting bone structure and bone density. It is especially important to bone health in growing fetuses and children.

Iron is vital to the body in aiding in the transportation of oxygen throughout the body. Iron is also effective in regulating cell growth and plays a role in maintaining energy and an effective immune system.

About the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing: The department administers the Medicaid and Child Health Plan *Plus* programs as well as a variety of other programs for Colorado's low-income, elderly and people with disabilities populations. The mission of the department is to improve access to cost-effective, quality health care services for Coloradans. For more information about the department, please visit Colorado.gov/hcpf.

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