

## **News Release**

*For more information,  
please contact:  
Danielle D'Agostino  
danielle.dagostino@rogers.com  
phone/fax: 905-274-7337*

### **For Immediate Release**

## Ontario Women Don't Know Enough About the Benefits of Folic Acid

*Provincial campaign encourages all women to  
take a daily multivitamin and eat a diet rich in folic acid*

*Toronto, Ontario – April 15, 2002 –* The Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario (FAAO) has launched its first-ever, province-wide campaign to promote the awareness of folic acid and its benefits in helping to prevent birth defects.

Folic acid is a B vitamin that is essential for the healthy development of a baby's spine, brain and skull. If taken prior to conception, it can reduce the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect (NTDs), by as much as 70 percent. To be effective, folic acid must be taken prior to conception because neural tube defects occur in the first four weeks of pregnancy – *before* most women even know they are pregnant. And, since many pregnancies are unplanned, it is important for all women who could become pregnant to take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid and eat a diet rich in folic acid.

“The information on folic acid and its benefits is not new,” says Anne Pastuszak, spokesperson for the Alliance and former Director of The Fetal Centre at the Hospital for Sick Children. “In fact, the issue has been around for 12 years now.”

So, why don't more women know about folic acid? A recent Ipsos-Reid survey conducted among Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, on behalf of the FAAO, found that while 80 percent of women have heard of folic acid, only 38 percent of women understand that folic acid must be taken *before* conception to help reduce the risk of NTDs. In fact, 41 percent of women had *not* heard of neural tube defects and only 42 percent understand that folic acid may reduce the risk of having a baby born with NTDs like spina bifida.

One in 1,300 total births are affected by a neural tube defect. Women can reduce their risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect by as much as 70 percent, by taking folic acid *before* getting pregnant.

All women who could become pregnant should be taking a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid. However, more than half of Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 40 years old *do not* take a daily multivitamin. Of the 43 percent who do take a multivitamin, only 76 percent take a multivitamin containing folic acid. In fact, 58 percent of women don't know how much folic acid they should consume daily. Women should also eat foods high in folic acid such as broccoli, spinach, orange juice and sunflower seeds, as well as foods fortified with folic acid, such as white flour, cereals and pasta.

"It's obvious that there is a great opportunity to educate women about the benefits of folic acid," says Pastuszak. "Women across Ontario can look for upcoming ads in magazines, buses and subways, information in their doctor's offices and pharmacies, as well as a web site – [www.folicacid.ca](http://www.folicacid.ca)."

Founding members of the Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario include: The Easter Seal Society of Ontario, The Fetal Centre at The Hospital for Sick Children, The Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario, Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre and The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. The member organizations came together in 1996 because they shared an interest in promoting the benefits of folic acid in preventing neural tube defects.

The 2002 public awareness and education campaign, which runs from March through June 2002, was made possible through the generous financial support of the Ontario Early Years, the Easter Seal Society of Ontario and the Centrum Foundation.

“The Folic Acid campaign reinforces Easter Seal’s goal to create solutions and change lives,” says Charlotte Gibson, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Ontario Easter Seal Society of Ontario. “We’re dedicated to supporting children and families whose lives have been affected by disabilities, but spreading the word about prevention is equally important.”

The Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario is a working group of health-related organizations and individuals who are committed to reducing the incidence of neural tube defects by promoting the consumption of folic acid. The 2002 campaign targets women between 18 and 45 years old through print and transit advertising, posters, brochures, public service announcements, community outreach activities and a web site – [www.folicacid.ca](http://www.folicacid.ca) . The campaign is also targeted to health care professionals across Ontario, to ensure that they are delivering accurate and consistent messages about the consumption of folic acid.

-30-

For more information about the Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario, its campaign or to schedule an interview, please contact: Danielle D’Agostino at 905-274-7337 or via email at: [danielle.dagostino@rogers.com](mailto:danielle.dagostino@rogers.com).