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Health Department Launches Mercury Study

Public health study will provide education and raise awareness

Studies show that babies born to mothers with high levels of mercury in their system are at higher risk for health problems including poor coordination, impaired speech, vision and hearing.

With the goal to raise awareness about the dangers of mercury and determine how many women may be at risk, the Martin County Health Department Environmental Health Division is launching a public health study on the issue.

With support from a grant from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Environmental Health staff will recruit 400 volunteers willing to complete a short questionnaire and donate a hair sample for the study. To participate, volunteers must be women aged 18- 49, who have lived in Martin County for at least the past year.

The samples will be collected by health department staff and sent to a state lab for analysis. Participants will be notified by mail with results.

Mercury is an element found naturally in the environment. It can also be found in the air and waterways as a result of industrial pollution. Most elevated mercury levels in humans is a result of eating fish with high levels of mercury including shark, tuna, marlin, king mackerel, Chilean sea bass and swordfish.

For women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, it is important to reduce the consumption of fish that are high in mercury. When fish consumption is reduced, mercury levels typically will be reduced to a safe range.

More information about the study is available at www.MartinCountyHealth.com

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