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**2007—Michigan's Year of Public Health
Washtenaw County Public Health Department Kicks Off
Healthy Beginnings Month in March**

YPSILANTI, Mich., March 5, 2007— Good health before pregnancy helps to protect a baby's growth and development. March is designated as "Healthy Beginnings" month, and Washtenaw County Public Health Department (WCPHD) officials are reminding women to take good care of themselves before, during, and after pregnancy to give their babies a healthy start.

"Long before a woman is ready to be pregnant, the decisions she makes, such as using effective family planning methods and taking steps to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, help her chances of having a healthy pregnancy," said Sharon P. Sheldon, MPH, WCPHD Health Promotion, Disease Prevention Manager.

Once a woman is pregnant, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department offers many services to help ensure a healthy baby, especially for low-income women.

"We offer maternal support programs, including the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program, not only because we care about women and babies but because they are good investment," said Sheldon. "In fact, for every dollar spent on WIC, \$3.50 is saved in future costs; saving lives means saving dollars."

Good nutrition prevents many health problems in babies. The best food for most babies is breast milk. Breast-feeding lowers a child's risk for many types of infections and allergies and may also help protect children from some health problems, such as eczema and asthma. Health Department officials encourage moms to breastfeed until their babies are 12 months old, or longer.

"The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is always working to promote healthy babies by encouraging good nutrition, sleep routines, and lots of tender loving care," said Shannon Richards, WCPHD Maternal Infant Health Supervisor. "Promoting healthy babies also means making sure parents know they need to secure their child in an age-appropriate car seat when riding in a motor vehicle."

Despite the best preparation, some babies are born with disabilities. Then, Health Department staff coordinates Children's Special Health Care Services, which provides financial assistance for health care for certain medical conditions, with other services from Intermediate School Districts, hospitals, and other organizations in the community.

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing health care, and protecting the environment. For additional information about preparing for a healthy pregnancy and baby, contact the Washtenaw County Public Health Department office at 734-544-6700 or visit <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>.

Additional information about the "**Public Health – For Michigan. For You**" slogan and "2007: The Year of Public Health" can be found at www.malph.org.