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### **HDHHS receives March of Dimes grant to improve health of Houston mothers, babies**

A March of Dimes grant will help the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) boost the number of pregnant women who enroll in its Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutritional program early in their pregnancies.

The \$34,400 grant's aim is a 10 percent increase among the approximately 23,400 women who sign up annually for WIC services in their first trimester. The grant seeks to increase the number of women receiving nutrition education and vouchers for nutritious foods at HDHHS' 19 WIC clinics from 5,100 to 7,500. HDHHS provided WIC services to a record 82,417 people in 2004.

"The grant will help us reach out to more low income and minority women since they are most likely to have high-risk pregnancies," said Judy Fraley, WIC's breastfeeding coordinator. "Reaching out to these at-risk women will reduce the number of babies born premature or with a very low birth weight."

HDHHS will use money from the grant to provide women who receive a positive pregnancy test at one of its seven health centers with small gifts to encourage early enrollment in WIC. The gifts include gift certificates to Randalls grocery stores and bus tokens for those who rely on public transportation to visit a WIC clinic.

WIC provides nutrition education and vouchers for nutritious foods to pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, women who have given birth in the last six months and children up to age five who have nutrition health-related problems. Its goal is to reduce premature births, low birth weigh, the fetal death rate and long-term medical expenses.

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Typically, WIC provides prenatal and breastfeeding support for mothers, formula for infants who are not breastfeeding and supplemental foods such as cereal, eggs, milk, juice, peanut butter and cheese for women and children. Also, each participating infant or child and their siblings receive immunizations at no cost.

A single pregnant woman with an annual income of less than \$17,705 qualifies for WIC services as well as a family of four with an annual income of less than \$35,798. For more information about enrolling in WIC, call 713-794-9090.

Standards for participation in WIC are the same for everyone regardless of sex, age, handicap, race, creed and national origin. People who feel that they have been discriminated against, can call 1-800-942-3678.

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