



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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### ADPH asks public to be aware of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Individuals of any age should make sure they are not at risk for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. The Alabama Department of Public Health joins the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other organizations in urging awareness of this nutritional disorder.

Low vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels occur among 1 in 31 adults 51 years of age and older. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency is simple to prevent and treat, but the signs and symptoms are easy to miss and are often overlooked.

According to the CDC, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency develops slowly, and symptoms appear so gradually that they can be missed. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can cause anemia over time. Its symptoms include feeling weak, tired and faint; heart palpitations; looking pale; and shortness of breath.

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can also cause symptoms such as nerve pain or tingling, dementia, mental illness, tremor, difficulty walking and frequent falls. It is commonly misdiagnosed as Alzheimer's disease, depression, peripheral neuropathy, vertigo and ministrokes. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency occurs in up to 15 percent of the elderly—approximately 5.4 million seniors. Other studies report the prevalence to be 15 to 25 percent.

In addition, infants, children and middle-aged adults become B<sub>12</sub> deficient for a variety of reasons. For instance, infants may develop B<sub>12</sub> deficiency if their mother is B<sub>12</sub> deficient while breastfeeding. In younger people B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can mimic postpartum depression/psychosis and autistic-like symptoms in children.

Groups of people at high risk for B<sub>12</sub> deficiency include vegans, vegetarians, alcoholics, people with eating disorders, celiac disease, Crohn's disease, those who have had gastric bypass surgery, and those who suffer from autoimmune diseases and AIDS. The use of certain medications such as proton pump inhibitors, metformin, H-2 blockers and nitrous oxide can also cause B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.

Visit your doctor if you have any symptoms.