



# Advocacy Update

Sent December 14, 2011

## **Jewish Genetic Diseases**

Our leaders have recommended that we read and publicize the Friday December 2, 2011, *Ten Minutes of Torah*, which focused on the impact of Jewish genetic diseases on the lives of children and their families. Written by Rabbi Larry Sernovitz, it is both a personal and powerful statement on a sensitive subject. He is concerned with bringing awareness to young people about nineteen genetic diseases that particularly affect Ashkenazi Jews and the availability of genetic screening to test for them. One in five Ashkenazi Jewish is a carrier for at least one of these genetic diseases – and all that is required to find out is a simple blood test.

In *Ten Minutes of Torah*, Rabbi Sernovitz expressed the hope that his information would help people “understand how important it is to have pre-marital testing for the . . . Jewish genetic diseases.” Rabbi Sernovitz is leading the workshop, "Jewish Genetic Disease and Awareness" at the URJ biennial to inform rabbis and Jewish leaders about the need to inform their congregants about genetic screening.

WRJ adopted a resolution on health in 2001 that includes a section on the Jewish genetic diseases. It urges WRJ affiliates to:

- Educate and inform sisterhood members, the congregation, and the Jewish and medical communities about genetic diseases among people of Ashkenazi descent and the availability of genetic counseling, testing and new treatments;
- Urge clergy to counsel Ashkenazi couples about the need for and availability of genetic counseling; and
- Support community programs to provide opportunities for genetic testing. WRJ women’s groups could help to make young adults aware of the importance of being tested by holding a program on the subject. A good source for information about program planning on this concern is available at the Victor Center of Jewish Genetic Diseases.

**Plan a program on Jewish genetic diseases for the next sisterhood year.**