



NEWS RELEASE

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Nation's Poison Centers Provide Assistance Combating Zika Virus Concerns

ALEXANDRIA, VA – With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently reporting a total of 1,962 cases of the Zika virus in the United States, millions of Americans are becoming increasingly concerned about accessing available prevention and treatment options. Additionally, with two reported Zika-related deaths, including a baby in Texas, the American Association of Poison Control Centers seeks to remind Americans of the nation's poison centers' ability to assist during public health crises.

“While poison control centers are well known for their ability to administer medical treatment advice during poisoning emergencies, many do not realize that these Centers, staffed by specially trained health care professionals, also support the nation's response to public health crises,” said Stephen T. Kaminski, JD, AAPCC CEO and Executive Director. “From managing and tracking exposures during the Gulf oil spill in 2010 to alerting West Virginia residents about hazardous chemical leaks into the water supply, poison centers have demonstrated repeatedly their capacity to respond quickly to public health emergencies. Now, with the latest threat of Zika on the U.S. home front, poison centers are once again demonstrating their broad capabilities.”

As the threat of the Zika virus in Florida escalated over the recent weeks, the Governor tasked the Surgeon General of the FL Department of Health to rapidly establish a Zika hotline. As was done many times in the past, the FL Department of Health turned to their established network of three poison control centers in the State to assist with the implementation of this directive. The Florida Poison Information Center Network, funded and operated under the Children's Medical Services Division of the Florida Department of Health, has extensive experience in these types of efforts, e.g. by hosting the Florida Flu (H1N1) Hotline, the Gulf Deepwater Horizon Hotline, the New England Compounding Fungal Meningitis Hotline, and most recently, the concurrent hosting of the Florida Zika Hotline and the Florida Blue-green Algae Outbreak Hotline.

The Florida Zika Hotline, utilizing an 800 number set up by the Florida Department of Health, was established in February 2016 and has currently managed over 4,000 calls. Last week, during the realization that mosquito-borne Zika transmission had occurred in South Florida, the call volume surged to over 1000 calls to the hotline. Despite the increase, the capabilities built into the Florida poison centers in advance allowed the system to accommodate this influx of cases without pause.

“The cooperative efforts of Poison Control Centers with their State and local government entities provides a robust system to mitigate public health issues like this,” said Bill Banner, MD, PhD,

FACMT, FAACT, Medical Director of the Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information, and current AAPCC President-Elect. “These services can be leveraged by the State’s Department of Health to establish a broad range of response capabilities based at the State and local level and therefore be promptly responsive to a local all-hazards approach; also including non-toxicological issues, such as a Flu Hotline.”

“If additional state funding is provided for poison control centers to establish and maintain readiness for these types of health crises, our centers’ support services can be more readily available when needed,” said Kaminski. “Due to their financial preparation, Florida’s Poison Centers were able to initiate the Zika hotline in a matter of hours following notification.”

For more information, the media may contact Angela Gonzales, AAPCC Associate Manager, Communications and Outreach, at 703-894-1865 or gonzales@aapcc.org.

*AAPCC supports the nation’s 55 poison center members in their efforts to treat and prevent drug, consumer product, animal, environmental and food poisoning. Members staff the Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222 that provides free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year from toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians and poison information providers. In addition, AAPCC maintains the only poison information and surveillance database in the United States, providing real-time monitoring of unusual poisoning patterns, chemical exposures and other emerging public health hazards. AAPCC partners with federal agencies such as HRSA, CDC, FDA and EPA, as well as private industry. **Be prepared for a poisoning emergency – including those related to topical insect repellents and insecticides -- and program the Poison Help phone number into your mobile telephone today – 1 (800) 222-1222.***

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