



FLORIDA POISON INFORMATION CENTER NETWORK  
floridapoisoncontrol.org

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 8, 2016

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## FLORIDA'S POISON CONTROL CENTERS ANSWER CALLS TO ZIKA HOTLINE

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA – As new, non-travel related cases of the Zika virus are announced, millions of Floridians are becoming increasingly concerned about accessing available prevention and treatment options. Additionally, with the Florida Department of Health currently reporting a total of 732 cases of the Zika virus in the state, the Florida Poison Control Centers have been asked to assist during this public health crisis.

"Most people know Poison Control Centers for their ability to administer medical treatment advice during poisoning emergencies, but many do not realize that these Centers also support the response to public health crises," said Alfred Aleguas, BS Pharm, PharmD, DABAT and Managing Director of the Florida Poison Control Center-Tampa. "From hosting the Florida Flu (H1N1) Hotline, to the Gulf Deepwater Horizon Hotline, and most recently the Florida Blue-Green Algae Outbreak Hotline, Poison Centers have repeatedly demonstrated their capacity to swiftly respond to public health emergencies."

As the threat of the Zika virus in Florida escalated over the recent weeks, Governor Rick Scott tasked Surgeon General Celeste Philip of the Florida Department of Health to rapidly establish a Zika Hotline (1-855-622-6735). As was done many times in the past, the Florida 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.

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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 more than 5,600 calls. Despite the increased number of calls, the capabilities built into the Florida Poison Centers in advance allowed the system to accommodate this influx of cases without pause.

“The joint efforts of our three Poison Control Centers with the Florida Department of Health provide a robust system to mitigate public health issues like this,” said Richard Weisman, PharmD, DABAT, Director of the Florida Poison Control Center-Miami. “These services can be leveraged to establish a broad range of response capabilities at the state and local levels and therefore be promptly responsive to a local all-hazards approach.”

“When additional state funding is provided for Poison Control Centers to maintain readiness for these types of health crises, our centers’ support services can be more readily available in a timely manner,” said Jay L. Schauben, PharmD, DABAT, FAACT, Director of the Florida Poison Control Center-Jacksonville. “Florida’s Poison Control Centers were able to initiate the Zika hotline in a matter of hours following notification because of their financial preparation.”

*The mission of the Florida Poison Control Centers is to provide exceptional care for individual patients and for supporting public health through information, surveillance, education and research. Experts staff the Poison Help Hotline at 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. To learn more, visit [floridapoisontcontrol.org](http://floridapoisontcontrol.org).*

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