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Healthy Families Florida Projects Take Zika Prevention Efforts Straight to Families

The problem: The Zika virus is now being spread by mosquitos in Florida. Zika can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus and can cause devastating birth defects. Zika can also be transmitted sexually. Florida families, especially pregnant women and their babies, are at risk of life-changing health consequences from the Zika virus.

The need: The Centers for Disease Control and the Florida Department of Health recommend a Zika prevention kit to help families stop transmission of the virus. Many families in our state face barriers, such as lack of transportation, to access prevention resources and health care.

We can help: Healthy Families Florida has launched an effort to get prevention supplies and critical information about Zika directly in the hands of Florida families in Miami-Dade, Monroe, Broward, Palm Beach and Orange Counties. Healthy Families Florida has purchased prevention items including insect repellent, bed nets and standing water treatment tabs. Healthy Families' network of trusted family support workers began distributing to 2,200 families who participate in Healthy Families programs in those counties during September.

As part of their duties, Healthy Families' family support workers build relationships with families, establish trust and regularly visit them in their homes. Our network of family support workers in every county is a natural fit for delivering critical public health messages and important prevention resources, such as the Zika prevention kits.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida and Healthy Families Florida anticipate beginning a second phase to provide Zika prevention kits to as many as 1,850 Florida families participating in Healthy Families in six additional counties during October: Collier, Hillsborough, Lee, Osceola, Polk and Seminole.

Partners: The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida is spearheading this project. Financial support and resources have been pledged from the Florida Blue Foundation, Spearman Family Foundation, Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions, Florida District of Kiwanis, philanthropists from the Ounce of Prevention Fund's Board of Directors and other Florida businesses. The Ounce of Prevention Fund has also engaged the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Department of Children and Families to provide print materials, a small number of complete kits designated for pregnant women and a small amount of funding to purchase kit materials. Kiwanis and Key Clubs across the state have recruited volunteers to assemble the kits for distribution by Healthy Families Florida.

As resources allow, prevention kits could be offered to families served by Healthy Start, Early Head Start, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers and other prevention programs.

About HFF: Healthy Families Florida is a nationally-accredited family support and coaching program that helps parents provide the safe and stable environments children need for healthy growth and development. In 2015-2016, Healthy Families Florida's 35 community-based projects, using state and local contributions, served 9,692 families and their 17,480 children. Parents voluntarily participate in services provided in their homes. Specially trained support workers help them improve their parenting skills and achieve goals that increase family stability and self-sufficiency. Services begin early. The most rapid period of brain development occurs during the first five years of life, the period in which most child abuse and neglect occurs. Healthy Families Florida engages parents during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of the baby so they gain the knowledge and skills they need right from the start, before abuse ever begins. Healthy Families Florida equips parents to overcome challenges and provide their children with safe, nurturing experiences that promote healthy growth and development. Families receive services tailored to meet their unique needs and risk factors. During visits, family support workers provide information on safe infant sleep and home safety, teach healthy coping skills and empower families to set goals that lead to self-sufficiency and stability.

Healthy Families Florida consistently achieves strong outcomes for families. As of June 2016:

- 98% of children in families served were free from abuse and neglect during services.
- 98% of children in families served were free from abuse and neglect one year following program completion.
- 84% of participants improved their self-sufficiency by gaining employment, enrolling in job training, furthering their education or securing stable housing.
- 98% of mothers did not have a subsequent pregnancy within two years.
- 99% of participants and their children were connected to a primary healthcare provider.
- 89% of children in Healthy Families Florida were fully immunized by age two.
- 93% of children received age-appropriate developmental screening.
- 88% of participants were screened for postnatal depression, a research-based risk factor for abuse and neglect.

For more information about Healthy Families Florida or to make a contribution to the Zika Prevention Project call Jennifer Ohlsen, Executive Director, Healthy Families Florida (850) 933-5597.