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NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK: AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE CAREERS BEHIND PUBLIC HEALTH IN FLORIDA AND THE PEOPLE WHO DO THEM

Preparedness & Response: Protecting Floridians Before, During and After Public Health Emergencies

Contact:

Communications Office

NewsMedia@flhealth.gov

850-245-4111

Tallahassee, Fla. – Prepare for the worst. Hope for the best. The old adage rings true for the Bureau of Preparedness and Response (BPR) at the Florida Department of Health. Even before disaster strikes in Florida, from hurricanes to terrorist attacks to infectious diseases, the dedicated team in BPR are preparing for these worst case scenarios with one goal in mind: keep Florida's citizens and visitors safe during all public health emergencies or events.

BPR is responsible for coordinating Florida's public health and health care system preparedness and response to incidents and events of all types. If you ask the people who make this their life's work, they'll tell you that it is a true passion. As Aaron Otis, Public Health Advisor and Operations Sections Chief in BPR says "Once preparedness is in your blood, it's hard not to want to help."

Otis' passion for preparedness led him to the Sunshine State in 2010 after he was recruited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help states like Florida implement their public health emergency preparedness program. In his role as Public Health Advisor, Otis works with county health departments to implement their preparedness plans for effective response to, and recovery from, incidents that overwhelm normal operations of public health and health care systems. Otis works with the BPR on all preparedness programs to ensure they are integrated and implemented. Otis also serves as a Lieutenant Commander in the Environmental Health Officer category of the United States Public Health Service.

Hollywood likes to use major natural disasters or global pandemics as fodder for movie entertainment, but as the credits are rolling you often think, what if that really happened? People like Otis work every day to prepare for the *what if* and *when* scenarios.

When crisis hits our state, the BPR works closely with the Florida Division of Emergency Management to coordinate public health and medical operations during a response. As the Operations Section Chief for all emergency response activities from the department, Otis and his team work to support counties who are responding to local public and medical impacts. The team's primary responsibility is to ensure that the counties have the resources needed to carry out public health and medical missions.

The BPR also has a team of people focused on maintaining a comprehensive public health and medical preparedness training, education and exercise system as well as a medical logistics unit that implements systems for dispersing critical medications, medical supplies and other resources to people in need during a public health emergency.

In 2016 alone, the BPR responded to the Zika virus, two hurricanes and the deadliest mass shooting in U.S history. Throughout these responses, the dedicated team in BPR worked around the clock to protect the health and safety of Floridians. The hours are grueling and the stress level is high, but the desire to serve drives them forward.

“There is nothing more rewarding than serving,” says Otis. “We do that by ensuring communities across the state are prepared for the worst and when the worst happens, we are right there to support them.”

Use #ThankAPublicHealthPro on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to recognize a public health professional in your area during National Public Health Week.

For more information on the BPR including how to prepare yourself and your family in the event of a disaster, please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

For more information about National Public Health Week, please visit www.nphw.org.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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