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New Jersey Department of Health Promotes Arthritis Foundation

May is Arthritis Awareness Month

In recognition of May as Arthritis Awareness Month, the Department of Health joins with the Arthritis Foundation, New Jersey Chapter in raising awareness of the prevalence of arthritis and the importance of seeking appropriate treatment to minimize the disabling impact of the disease.

"Living with arthritis can be both physically debilitating and emotionally draining," said Health Commissioner Mary E. O'Dowd. "Receiving an early diagnosis and treatment can improve one's overall health and protect the joints from ongoing pain and the permanent damage of uncontrolled inflammation."

The term arthritis means "joint inflammation" commonly used to describe more than 100 diseases and conditions, including childhood arthritis, fibromyalgia, gout, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Most commonly characterized by pain, stiffness and swelling in and around the joints, arthritis can also involve the immune system and various internal organs.

According to a study published by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2013, 52.5 million adults in the United States have arthritis. Two-thirds of people who live with arthritis are under age 65, including 300,000 children.

In New Jersey, more than 1.4 million adults have arthritis ranging in age from 18 to 75+ years old. Women (895,000) exceed men (533,000) in the number of diagnosed cases. More than 8,600 children are living with juvenile arthritis (JA), one of the most common childhood diseases.

Arthritis costs the U.S. economy \$128 billion each year in healthcare and related costs.

Appropriate management of arthritis, including self-management activities, can help people with arthritis decrease pain, improve function, stay productive and lower health care costs.

The five self-management activities promoted by the CDC include:

- Learning arthritis management strategies: Techniques involve ways to reduce pain, fatigue and stress.
- Being active: Research shows that physical activity decreases pain, improves function and delays disability.
- Maintaining a healthy weight: Studies show weight control reduces the risk of developing arthritis and may decrease disease progression.

- Seeing a doctor: Early diagnosis and appropriate management is important, especially for inflammatory types of arthritis.
- Protecting the joints: Joint injury and repetitive motions can lead to osteoarthritis.

To commemorate Arthritis Awareness Month, the Arthritis Foundation sponsors *Walk to Cure Arthritis* events throughout the United States. These public awareness and fund raising activities motivate Americans to get up and moving while raising funds for arthritis research.

Two upcoming Arthritis Walks are being held in New Jersey:

Fairleigh Dickinson University

Sunday, May 31

Registration opens at 8:00 a.m.

Walk begins at 10:00 a.m.

Verona Park & Boathouse

Sunday, June 7

Registration opens at 8:30 a.m.

Walk begins at 10:00 a.m.

For more information about these events, go to <http://www.arthritis.org/new-jersey/>.

To learn more about the diagnosis and treatment of arthritis, visit the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/>; or the New Jersey Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation at <http://www.arthritis.org/new-jersey/>