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**Palm Beach County to be Ready For Emergency
Public Health and United Way Looking for Volunteers**

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL –The role of public health has expanded in recent years and the Palm Beach County Health Department and its community partners like United Way of Palm Beach County, American Red Cross, Palm Beach County Division of Emergency Management, businesses, municipalities and other first responders have joined together to create a network that will assist all people in a mass emergency.

In 2006 the Palm Beach County Health Department was designated a Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) and charged with the task of being able to reach, treat and assist with the health needs of all 1.3 million residents in a 48 hour period. Each situation will be different. Some will require quick education on home treatment, available hospitals, alternate shelters and locations for aid like the start of an influenza event. Should a chemical or biological release (smallpox or Anthrax) occur it would require centers to be open throughout the county that could triage, treat and dispense medications.

“These plans are only as good as the people who will be getting involved,” commented Health Department Preparedness Coordinator, Al Grasso. “We are challenging our community to come forward and volunteer now so we can be ready in the future.”

The Health Department has identified the need for 45 locations that would be activated in an emergency. Each of those sites could dispense medications to about 600 people per hour over a two day period. Manpower is of the utmost importance as it is estimated to take 6,000 volunteers working along side pre-assigned first responders to make this a success.

Persons interested in volunteering will need to pre-register through the United Way's Volunteer program. All will receive training and be put on a priority list, along with their immediate family, to receive medications before the activation of the dispensing sites.

“The jobs are varied and include staging, educating, managing, writing, communicating, handling supplies and just being there for your friends and neighbors,” said Grasso.

Persons interested in volunteering should be 18 years or older, understand English but may also speak other languages like Spanish, Portuguese, or Creole. For information or to sign-up as a volunteer, call United Way's Volunteer Center at (561)375-6685 or visit www.unitedwaypb.org. In keywords type “preparedness” to find the volunteer opportunity. The Health Department Preparedness Office is at 561-355-3524 or www.pbchd.com.

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