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Top Birth Defects Researchers Converge in Clearwater to Discuss Zika, Opioids

Teratology Society's Annual Meeting June 23 – 27 Attracts FL Surgeon General as Keynote Speaker

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA— “Remaining vigilant about Zika is incredibly important.” It’s the primary theme Celeste Philip, MD, MPH, Florida Surgeon General and Secretary of the FL Department of Health wants to emphasize as she prepares to address the world’s leading birth defects researchers June 23 – 27 at the Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort for the [Teratology Society's Annual Meeting](#). Florida’s response to the Zika epidemic will be highlighted alongside other emerging reproductive threats such as the opioid crisis.

In a ground-breaking [2016 review](#) led by Teratology Society Past President Sonja Rasmussen, MD, MS, Zika virus exposure during pregnancy was found to cause major birth defects such as brain abnormalities and adverse neurological outcomes of affected babies. Florida became the first state in the U.S. to confirm transmission of Zika through mosquitoes. “Mosquito-borne illness will always be a threat in Florida, but we are certainly not unique in that regard, so it is especially crucial for us to convey the importance of prevention to the public and our partners on both a local and global scale,” said Dr. Philip. As the Keynote Speaker scheduled to address hundreds of researchers on [Monday, June 25 at 8am](#), Dr. Philip will showcase the FL Department of Health’s work with various stakeholders to monitor and respond to Zika. “We are still working toward solutions like vaccine development, point-of-care testing and proven vector control methods to ensure that Zika never poses as much of a threat as it did in 2016.”

“As the premier source for cutting-edge birth defects research, the Teratology Society is uniquely established in bringing together clinical researchers and basic scientists to improve prevention and treatment techniques surrounding Zika as well as other epidemics of concern in pregnancy such as opioid abuse,” said Alan Hoberman, PhD, Teratology Society President. “Opioid use disorder is a public health crisis and one we will address scientifically as opioid use during pregnancy has led to a sharp increase in the rate of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS),” he explained. “Opiates: Impact on Pregnancy and Child Development Symposium” will take place [June 25 at 2:05pm](#) and feature speakers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, as well as Harvard Medical School and the University of Kentucky.

According to Dr. Philip, Florida is no stranger to the opioid epidemic. The Florida Birth Defects Registry (FBDR) tracks the number of infants diagnosed with NAS – a reportable condition – and rates of NAS among Florida’s infants have increased over the past four years. “Pregnancy provides an important opportunity to identify and treat women with substance use disorders,” she said. “As we have shared Florida’s lessons learned from our Zika virus response, we hope to learn about new programs and interventions that will improve our ability to decrease the number of opioid overdose deaths and impacts on infants, children, and families.”

In addition to Zika and opioids, the latest birth defects-related research set to be presented during the five-day long conference includes, but isn't limited to, malaria prevention and treatment, autism, prenatal alcohol exposure, and cancer risk in children affected with birth defects. More information on the annual meeting program, as well as single day rates for local clinicians and researchers wishing to attend the meeting, may be found on [the 58th Annual Meeting website](#).

About the Teratology Society

[The Teratology Society](#) is an international and multidisciplinary group of scientists including researchers, clinicians, epidemiologists, and public health professionals from academia, government and industry who study birth defects, reproduction, and disorders of developmental origin. The Teratology Society is made up of nearly 700 members worldwide specializing in a variety of disciplines, including developmental biology and toxicology, reproduction and endocrinology, epidemiology, cell and molecular biology, nutritional biochemistry, and genetics as well as the clinical disciplines of prenatal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, neonatology, medical genetics, and teratogen risk counseling. Scientists interested in membership in the Teratology Society are encouraged to visit www.teratology.org.

The society's official journal, *Birth Defects Research*, is published by [John Wiley & Sons](#) in partnership with the Teratology Society.

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