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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN LEVY CELEBRATES AMERICAN HEART MONTH

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Bronson, Fla. - February marks American Heart Month and it is a great time to commit to a healthy lifestyle and make small changes that can lead to a lifetime of heart health and help fight heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in Florida and the nation.

Levy County's incidence rates of heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure are among the highest in the state. Many of these cases are preventable and individuals can take steps to reduce their risk. "It is the job of the Department of Health in Levy County to partner with local organizations to educate and empower residents of Levy County to make healthy choices," says Barbara Locke, Administrator for the Levy County Health Department.

Each year heart disease causes one in four deaths in the United States. There were 42,835 heart attack hospitalizations in Florida in 2014 or an average of 117 heart attack hospitalizations each day. About half of all Americans have at least one of the three risk factors for heart disease which include high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking. While all Americans are at risk for heart disease, the non-Hispanic black community is at the greatest risk.

The department recently launched a new pilot program in Levy County to combat heart disease called Heart Heath Plus. The pilot program is being conducted in 17 Florida counties that showed the greatest need for heart disease prevention programs. Heart Health Plus implements evidence-based strategies to engage faith-based organizations, health systems and local communities in heart disease awareness and prevention activities.

The Florida Department of Health in Levy County will be working with local faith based groups in the coming months to educate citizens on heart health and implement the Heart Health Plus Initiative.

Many of the risk factors for heart disease can be eliminated with diet, exercise and taking steps to quit smoking. During American Heart Month, follow these simple tips to keep your heart healthy and fight heart disease.

- Add exercise to your daily routine, even if it's just taking regular walks with family and friends;
- Schedule a visit with your doctor to talk about your heart health;
- Increase healthy eating by cooking heart healthy meals; and
- Take steps to quit smoking by utilizing the Tobacco Free Florida's Quit Your Way Program.

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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