Pregnancy Health Experts Unveil Zika Virus Educational Tools Ahead of World Birth Defects Day

***MotherToBaby Creates Zika Fact Sheets, Launches New Media** (Scroll down for additional resources, video)*

BRENTWOOD, TN – As information surrounding the Zika virus continues to evolve, MotherToBaby, a service of the international non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), unveils new tools to bring the most accurate, evidence-based information to pregnant and breastfeeding women. Easy-to-understand fact sheets regarding Zika, as well as insect repellant use during pregnancy, are now available on www.MotherToBaby.org. Additionally, teratogen information specialists (experts trained in the field of birth defects) have begun taking questions about exposures from the general public and health care providers beyond its traditional telephone line – through private, live chat, text messaging and e-mail.

MotherToBaby, a suggested resource by many agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Office of Women's Health, recognizes the urgent need for providing pregnant women, those planning a pregnancy, as well as breastfeeding moms with the most up-to-date information about the Zika virus and other potential causes of preventable birth defects. MotherToBaby is an official supporter of World Birth Defects Day, which is recognized by more than 50 international organizations each year on March 3rd.

"With the information and research about Zika changing on an almost daily basis, it can be confusing and, potentially, cause unnecessary anxiety for a pregnant woman," said Stephen Braddock, MD, incoming president of MotherToBaby who serves as the Director of Medical Genetics at Saint Louis University. "That's why MotherToBaby's specifically-trained teratogen experts are here to sift through and interpret the evolving Zika-related research, putting it into perspective so a woman can make informed health decisions in collaboration with her health care provider," added Dr. Braddock.

The challenges of staying up-to-date on the changing Zika information are lessened since OTIS, the professional society which provides the MotherToBaby service, includes members and researchers currently in the thick of the Zika outbreak. Lavinia Schuler-Faccini, PhD, lead author of one of the first ground-breaking studies to examine the association between the Zika virus in pregnant women and microcephaly (small head and brain) in their babies, is part of the MotherToBaby/OTIS network. Dr. Schuler-Faccini is President of the Brazilian Society of Medical Genetics (Sociedade Brasileira de Genetica Medica).

"Being based in Brazil, one of the countries where Zika has been declared an 'outbreak,' has allowed me to communicate the very latest research to my American colleagues," said Dr. Schuler-Faccini. "For example, I was able to provide region-specific information where infected mosquitos are currently located to a worried American traveler who had contacted MotherToBaby," she added.

More about Zika
On February 1, 2016 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global public health emergency over Zika virus, due to its suspected ability to cause microcephaly in unborn babies. Zika virus was first identified in Africa in 1947. In 2013, there were outbreaks in islands in the Pacific, and now outbreaks are being reported in many Central and South American countries. Isolated cases have also been reported in the U.S. in people who have recently traveled to South American countries, and in Puerto Rico, over the last few weeks. Additionally, just last week, federal health officials reported strong evidence that more than a dozen people have caught the virus through sexual transmission.

About MotherToBaby
MotherToBaby provides free, evidence-based, personalized risk assessments, education and counseling regarding the effects of exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Examples of exposures include the Zika virus,

prescription and over-the-counter medications, alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, vaccines, beauty products, herbal supplements, chemicals and more. The public, as well as health care providers, can be connected with a MotherToBaby expert through its traditional toll-free phone line, 866-626-6847, via text message at 855-999-3525, or through live chat and email on www.MotherToBaby.org.

More than 100,000 women and their health care providers seek information about birth defects prevention from MotherToBaby every year. MotherToBaby has been able to launch new outreach efforts to reach underserved populations and launch new communication technologies through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration.



About World Birth Defects Day
Along with more than 50 birth defects-related organizations around the world, MotherToBaby is helping to raise awareness of this critical global issue by participating in World Birth Defects Day, which is observed yearly on March 3. The commemorative day not only helps to raise awareness of the problem of birth defects, but also the importance of improving prevention strategies and research that will ultimately lead to fewer birth defects and a healthier society.

More Resources

- **Health care providers interested in viewing the recording of a National Society for Genetic Counselors joint webinar on research surrounding Zika, click here.**
- **MotherToBaby's Dee Quinn, MS, CGC provides the latest Zika research on "*The Vibrant Gene*" program:**
- **MotherToBaby's Public Affairs Committee has also issued an official statement about the Zika virus, which can be read here.**
- **Our sister society, the Teratology Society, has recently published a blog looking closely at the science needed to learn more about Zika as well. Read its latest *Birth Defects Insights* blog here.**

# # #
Media Contact: Nicole Chavez, 619-368-3259, nchavez@MotherToBaby.org. Interviews in Spanish can also be arranged.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

Disclaimer: MotherToBaby Fact Sheets are meant for general information purposes and should not replace the advice of your health care provider. MotherToBaby is a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). Copyright by OTIS, March 2, 2016.