Minneapolis, MN – The Preeclampsia Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to reducing maternal and infant illness and death due to preeclampsia and related hypertensive disorders of pregnancy such as HELLP Syndrome, today announced its 5th Annual Awareness Walk. The walks will take place in 17 cities across the United States and Canada during the month of May, with most events occurring Mother's Day weekend. The annual walk helps raise funds to support innovative research and to raise public awareness of this potentially devastating disease. This year, the fundraising and awareness-building event will also be used to enroll participants in a genetics research study.

U.S. locations include: San Diego, Calif.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Davenport, Iowa; Edina Park, Minn.; North Conway, N.H.; Cranford, N.J.; Ellwood City, Pa.; South Central, Pa.; Stahlstown, Pa.; Dallas/Forth Worth, Texas; Tooele, Utah; Wausau, Wis.; Madison, Wis.; Abingdon, Va.; Canadian locations include: Kamloops, British Columbia; Vancouver, British Columbia; and Cobdan, Ontario. More locations are still being added.

For some locations, this is the 5th year they have successfully held a walk, attracting hundreds of walkers and supporters and raising thousands of dollars; others are participating for the first time. See www.preeclampsia.org for specific information about a walk near you. Registration is available online though walk-up registrations will also be accepted at each of the sites. People everywhere are also encouraged to gather close friends and family for a "Friends and Family Walk" to help drive awareness and contribute to this important fundraiser.

For the first time, each location will also have a research registration booth, offering the opportunity to all preeclampsia survivors and their families to enroll in a genetics study, being coordinated by the Preeclampsia Foundation through the University of Southern California (USC) School of Medicine.

Several of the locations have scheduled other auxiliary events such as silent auctions, special speakers from the medical community, and memorial programs to remember those who have lost their lives because of this pregnancy disorder.

"Mother's Day weekend is deliberately chosen each year as the time we focus on this devastating disorder," explained Executive Director Eleni Tsigas. "Over 200,000 women each year are affected by preeclampsia, a number equivalent to breast cancer. Many of those mothers suffer the tragic loss of their babies or endure the challenge of a premature baby, sometimes with life-long disabilities. It's important that we celebrate Mother's Day and especially honor those mothers who have endured preeclampsia."

Preeclampsia, sometimes referred to by its older name, toxemia, or pregnancy-induced hypertension (PIH), is a disorder that occurs during pregnancy and affects both the mother and the fetus. It is a rapidly progressive condition characterized by elevated blood pressure, swelling and protein in the urine. The cause of preeclampsia is still not fully understood, and the only "cure" for the condition starts with delivery. Approximately 5 to 8 percent of pregnancies are affected by preeclampsia, it is the leading known cause of preterm births, and is responsible for

approximately 18% of all maternal deaths.