Minneapolis, Minn. – New survey results released today by the Preeclampsia Foundation indicate that over half of pregnant woman are not informed about the signs and symptoms of preeclampsia, a life-threatening condition that complicates one in twelve pregnancies. This lack of awareness translates to worse health outcomes; the incidence of infant death is twice as great for women who give birth prematurely, but were not properly educated by their health care providers.

"This is the reason we have designated May as Preeclampsia Awareness Month with Awareness Walks scheduled this coming weekend around the country. We must emphasize that knowing the signs and symptoms of preeclampsia can make a critical difference in pregnancy outcomes," said the President of the Board of Directors, Leslie G. Weeks, a two-time preeclampsia/HELLP Syndrome survivor. She continued, "The best thing for a mother and her baby will always be to go to term, but when the onset of preeclampsia requires premature delivery, our survey showed that women who knew what to look for with respect to preeclampsia had 50 percent fewer losses."

According to a recent Preeclampsia Foundation survey of more than 1300 women who have given birth, approximately one-third reported a premature birth (<36 weeks gestation for this survey). Of those preemies, 18 percent were either stillborn or died within the first year from birth-related complications (as compared to 1 percent of full-term pregnancies). Fifty-two percent of the mothers who lost babies stated categorically that they did not receive information about the warning signs for preeclampsia. Add that group to those who could not remember if they got the information, and the number of uninformed mothers who lost babies swelled to 66 percent.

Weeks added, "The data clearly suggest a connection between knowledge and outcomes. It is the Preeclampsia Foundation's position that every pregnant woman should receive detailed information about preeclampsia and its symptoms; it can literally be a matter of life and death for many babies. Information can be provided in an easy-to-understand manner without creating anxiety. It's one of the simplest interventions that can improve health outcomes for preeclampsia." She also noted, "While this study looked at infant health and outcomes, we cannot lose sight of the fact that too many women also die as a result of preeclampsia-related complications."

Preeclampsia is a disorder of pregnancy, typically occurring after the 20th week of gestation. It is characterized by sudden and dangerous spikes in blood pressure, protein in the urine,

abnormal swelling of feet, face, and hands, upper abdominal pain, and nausea. The only known treatment is to deliver the baby. Preeclampsia is the most common known cause of premature birth and responsible for half a million neonatal deaths worldwide.

Executive Director J. Thomas Viall underscored other significant findings of the survey:

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While 95 percent of respondents reported having a urine test as part of their prenatal care, based on 2006 statistics (4.3 million births), more than 200,000 pregnant women did not get one of the two standard clinical diagnostic tests for preeclampsia.

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Only 43 percent of respondents said they definitely received information about preeclampsia from their health care provider. Again, based on 2006 statistics, 57 percent – almost 2,500,000 pregnant women – were uninformed or unsure when it came to the dangers of preeclampsia.

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There was no significant correlation between awareness of preeclampsia and the woman's level of education or household income.

"If anyone learns anything from this survey," said Viall, "it will be that pregnant women need to educate and empower themselves to work in partnership with their health care providers." He added that the Foundation will be publishing recommendations for prenatal care and counseling regarding preeclampsia, but remarked, "There is no reason why a health care provider reading the results of this survey shouldn't start educating their pregnant patients about preeclampsia right now, with frequent reminders of the disorder's signs and symptoms at all prenatal appointments. Our free patient brochures and refrigerator magnets can be useful tools in this regard."

About the 2008 Awareness Walks

Some of the larger Awareness Walks are being held in York, Pa.; Research Triangle Park, N.C.; Davenport, Iowa; Madison, Wisc.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Tooele, Utah; and San Diego, Calif. Many other, smaller “Friends and Family” Walks are also being held around the country. More information about the 4th Annual Awareness Walks is available at www.preeclampsia.org .