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National Epilepsy Awareness Month

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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November is National Epilepsy Awareness Month. Epilepsy affects people of all ages and races, and represents one percent of the population in this country—nearly 3 million people.

Epilepsy is a brain disorder characterized by recurrent, disturbances in the electrical functions of the brain that result in seizures. This can result from many causes, including traumatic brain injury, stroke, central nervous system infections, brain tumor, genetics, and others. Not all persons with seizures have epilepsy and it is diagnosed only when the seizures are chronic and accompanied by an underlying condition.

Persons of all ages can develop epilepsy, but incidence rates are higher among young children and older adults. Recurrent seizures often result in limitations in activities, injury, depression, anxiety, and impaired quality of life and can increase risk for death.

Misconceptions about epilepsy are common and contribute to the stigma often associated with the condition.

This year’s National Epilepsy Awareness theme is “Get Seizure Smart” and focuses on the importance of seizure recognition and first aid. Many persons do not know how to recognize and respond appropriately to a person having a seizure. During the month of November, the Epilepsy Foundation will launch an interactive website that will provide educational materials and other resources to support this effort.

According to the Epilepsy Foundation, many law enforcement and emergency response personnel are able to respond successfully to recognizable forms of seizures and intervene appropriately, but some might not recognize more subtle seizure symptoms in persons they encounter who appear to be confused, unable to communicate, or exhibit behaviors inappropriate to time and place. Such persons might not obey directives and might become involuntarily combative, resulting in inappropriate arrest, possible injury, and, in some cases, death.

In partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Epilepsy Foundation is continuing a national education and outreach program to educate and train law enforcement officers, police cadets, and emergency response personnel to increase their recognition of seizures and to protect the safety and rights of persons having seizures.