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Office of Emergency Preparedness

PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Launches Oil Spill Distress Helpline

The United States Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) has launched a new toll-free helpline to provide information, support and counseling for families and children affected by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Oil Spill Distress Helpline (1-800-985-5990) links callers to behavioral healthcare services and will serve as an important resource for the localized oil spill outreach efforts in the Gulf Coast states.

“There are many here who will continue to suffer the effects of this oil spill over the next several years,” said Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph. “Most of these people have never had to face problems like this and may not be ready, able or willing to seek professional help. This helpline gives them the ability to get the help they need while maintaining their privacy.”

Administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Helpline will route callers to the nearest Gulf Coast area crisis center, where trained staff from the region will answer calls and provide assistance. In addition, these crisis centers are working to provide support via text messages, a capability which will launch later this fall.

“We know that residents throughout the Gulf Coast region continue to deal with the disruption to their livelihoods and communities caused by the oil spill,” said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. “The resulting stress they are feeling is real, and if behavioral health conditions are left untreated, we can expect that the situations these individuals and their families are living in will worsen. The Oil Spill Distress Helpline will be a critical tool in getting people the help they need, and I want to acknowledge the state, local and federal partnership that helped get it set up and available.”

The helpline is funded by BP’s contribution to SAMHSA, which will help states to provide counseling and support for individuals and families in the Gulf Coast region affected by the oil spill.

For more information, visit the HHS BP Gulf Oil Spill page at <http://www.hhs.gov/gulfoilspill/index.html>.

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