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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Sexual assault and abuse is any type of sexual activity that you do not agree to, including:

- Inappropriate touching
- Vaginal, anal or oral penetration
- Sexual intercourse that you say no to
- Rape or attempted rape
- Child molestation

Sexual assault can be verbal, visual or anything that forces you to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention. Examples of this are voyeurism (when someone watches private sexual acts), exhibitionism (when someone exposes him/herself in public), incest (sexual contact between family members) and sexual harassment. It can happen in different situations – by a stranger in an isolated place, on a date or in the home by someone you know.

Rape is a common form of sexual assault. It happens in many situations – on a date, by a friend or an acquaintance or when you think you are alone. “Date rape” drugs can be slipped into a drink when you not looking. Date rape drugs make a person unable to resist assault and can cause memory loss so the victim doesn’t know what happened. Never leave your drink unattended. Try to always be aware of your surroundings.

There are things you can do to reduce your chances of being sexually assaulted. Follow these tips:

- Be aware of your surroundings – who’s out there and what’s going on.
- Walk with confidence. The more confident you look, the stronger you appear.
- Don’t let drugs or alcohol affect your judgment.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in your surroundings, leave.
- At home, lock your doors and windows, even if you leave for just a few minutes.
- Watch your keys. Don’t lend them to anyone. Don’t leave them. Don’t lose them. Don’t put your name and address on the key ring.
- Watch out for unwanted visitors. Know who’s on the other side of the door before you open it.
- Be wary of isolated spots, like parking garages, offices after business hours and apartment laundry rooms.
- Avoid walking or jogging alone, especially at night. Have your key ready to use before you reach the door – home, car, or work.
- Park in well-lit areas and lock the car, even if you’ll only be gone a few minutes.
- Drive on well-traveled streets, with doors and windows locked.
- Never hitchhike or pick up a hitchhiker.
- Keep your car in good shape with plenty of gas in the tank.

If you have been sexually assaulted, **get to safety and call 911**. For more information, call the Pinellas County Health Department’s injury and violence prevention program at 824-6916.

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