New Jersey tipline helps keep families safe

With the Memorial Day weekend officially marking the start to summer-time activities, it's time to start enjoying the summer weather and all that comes with it.

To do so, NJ 211 provides the resources to make sure that parents and individuals take the precautions that will keep them and their families safe.

NJ 211 is the free, user-friendly phone number that serves 90 percent of America's population and connects some 16 million people a year to critical resources, information and services. In New Jersey, more than 210,000 people turned to 211 for help last year.

To prepare New Jersey families for the summer season, NJ 211 has launched several pages on its website www.nj211.org - devoted to summer safety tips, as well as offering useful summer camp resources, information about food safety, tips on staying cool and energy conservation. These resources are also available by calling 211.

“The summer season should be a time for children, parents and individuals of all ages to be outdoors, enjoying all of the wonderful recreational opportunities our state offers,” said Laura Zink Marx, executive director of NJ 211 Partnership, in a news release. "What we have tried to do is give parents and individuals a one-stop resource here at NJ 211 for finding safety tips, information on camps and parks and recreational activities to make their summer experience the most enjoyable it can be."

A summer safety tips page offers health and safety recommendations with an intentional focus on the very young and the very old as these populations are the most vulnerable to the heat. This includes information on sun protection, water safety, recreational water illnesses, leaving children unattended in a car, caution with outdoor grills, play equipment and ensuring children wear safety helmets when participating in biking, roller blading and skateboard activities.

Additionally, with school ending in a month, sign-ups for summer camp are well underway. Parents are often interested in helping their children find summer activities that will foster personal growth and happiness. For parents wondering outside of their homes finding child care options that are affordable, safe and fun are even more essential. Camp, be it a day or residential program is one alternative to explore. Activity programs are often available through town recreational departments and local civic groups. Organizations such as the YMCA and YWCA and girl scouts, scouting programs, the Police Athletic League (PAL) and even local libraries may offer viable options.

A county-by-county listing of camps run by organizations like the YMCA, YWCA and boy/girl scouts can be found on the NJ 211 summer camp page. The page includes a brief description of the programs offered, a link to the organization's website and essential contact information.

Many more camping options can be found by searching the NJ 211 resource database using the search term "camp." The website and the database of community resources were created to work in tandem. The website content pages provide a brief overview of the topic being discussed and offer important links and contact information for further details. A search bar is available on every page of the website so that visitors can find all of the local resources, and in this case a search on the term camp retrieves more than 250 programs.

Residents can always dial 211 from any phone and ask for assistance to find resources that best meet their needs.

NJ 211 also has launched a new web page focusing on low-to-no cost recreational options including resources for free children’s movies and information about county parks and the recreation programs and activities sponsored throughout the summer for the enjoyment of local residents.

United Ways have been longstanding supporters and the national leader of the 211 movement in Partnership with AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Services). As the largest private funder of the 211 network, the United Ways of New Jersey, in partnership with the state, continue to strengthen and support it as another way to build stronger communities in the state, according to the news release.