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Violence can be addressed from public health perspective

MOBILE, Alabama — Violent crimes are now clearly recognized as a public health problem. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Report, law enforcement agencies across the nation have shown an overall increase of 5.3 percent in the number of violent crimes from the first six months of 2016 when compared to the same time in 2015. These statistics include murder, rape and aggravated assault.

“All lives matter,” said Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer for Mobile County. “Death is death regardless of the color of your skin, or your country of origin, or your religious beliefs. The premature loss of life is a public health issue.”

Based on the 2015 FBI numbers (the last full year available), Mobile is not in the Top 30 most dangerous cities based on population. Murders per 100,000 residents are at 9.6 in Mobile, 7.2 in Alabama and 4.9 in the United States. These figures trail cities such as St. Louis (59.3), Baltimore (55.4), Detroit (43.8), New Orleans (41.7) and Birmingham (37.2). One name to likely join this list is Chicago, which has already recorded more than 400 homicides midway through 2017.

In Alabama, Birmingham ranks fifth overall in the U.S. for violent crimes. In 2015, the state’s largest city had 79 murders and 3,707 violent crimes. Next were Huntsville (18 murders; 1,541 violent crimes), Mobile (24 murders; 1,529 violent crimes) and Montgomery (33 murders; 1,042 violent crimes). By percentage, Anniston led all Alabama communities with 607 violent crimes among its population of 22,306.

“We must educate our population about what is going on in Chicago, Baltimore and the rest of the country,” Dr. Eichold said. “Violent crime is not a local phenomenon. It is going up all throughout the U.S.

“The Mobile County Health Department encourages everyone to exercise caution in things we know that cause problems. You can do simple things like avoid walking alone at night, allowing strangers into your home, taking advantage of neighborhood watch groups and avoid expressing hostility about the driving events of others (road rage)!”

“If you leave your home to go somewhere and you feel you need a weapon for protection, maybe you just don’t go.”