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Freedom Tower, PortMiami bridge all going blue for autism awareness

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Miami's Freedom Tower and the Port of Miami Bridge will join nearly 2,000 structures around the world that will illuminate with a special blue light in recognition on Monday night the start of Autism Awareness Month.

The blue lights are a part of Autism Speaks' third annual Light It Up Blue campaign to raise autism awareness.

"We are creating awareness in communities all over the world," said Lula Folgosa, Miami chapter executive director for Autism Speaks. "I feel this is a crisis and people need to know what's out there."

An estimated 1 in 88 children are identified with an autism spectrum disorder according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network. Autism is nearly five times more likely in males, impacting one in 54 boys, versus one in 252 girls.

"Those are great odds in Las Vegas and terrible odds for people who are going to have children in the next decade," said Daniela Foley, 37, of South Miami, whose children Kaden, 5, Grayson, 3, fall in the autism spectrum. "Now is the time to put the puzzle together and find the answers to what is causing it."

Other buildings that will go blue in Miami include the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, the Miami Tower and Mass Mutual/LINQ Financial, in Coral Gables.

Globally the Empire State Building in New York City, the Christ the Redeemer Statue in Brazil, the Sydney Opera House in Australia, and the International Space Station will also go blue.

It's not just buildings that will go blue for autism awareness.

Autism Speaks is encouraging people to light their homes with specially marked blue light bulbs and LED lanterns sold exclusively at Home Depot stores nationwide. People are also encouraged to wear blue on Monday, sport an Autism Speaks puzzle piece pin and incorporate blue in on social media sites pictures.

"For us the most important part is the awareness," said Wilson Cristancho, 47, of Kendall, whose son Marc Anthony, 10, has autism. "World wide numbers show, and prove, this is a serious problem."

Both Cristancho and Foley plan to attend autism awareness events throughout the month and have already changed the lights in front of their homes to blue.

"I wear my blue puzzle piece pin everyday," Foley said. "It touches me when I see people supporting the cause who aren't directly affected by it. I am personally touched by that."

For other Light It Up Blue events go to www.lightitupblue.org.

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