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DC Officials Initiate Asthma Call to Action for DC Children and Youth
Public-private collaborative effort promotes proper asthma and anaphylaxis management

Washington, D.C.—The growing problem of asthma among children and youth in the District of Columbia (DC) spurred a call to action today for a renewed effort to improve asthma and anaphylaxis management for DC children and youth. DC Councilmember Harry Thomas, Jr. (Ward 5), DC Councilmember David A. Catania (At-Large), and senior officials from the DC Department of Health, DC Public Schools, DC Department of Parks and Recreation, The HSC Foundation and community organizations launched this joint endeavor at Ward 5’s Trinidad Recreation Center with asthma screenings and information for residents.

“Asthma, a common but serious chronic illness, often is missed or ignored in DC children, limiting their ability to lead full, active lives,” said Councilmember Thomas. “I am pleased and proud that the District is proactively taking steps to promote the treatment of childhood asthma.”

Councilmember Catania presented a joint resolution, co-sponsored with Councilmember Thomas, applauding this collaborative effort, which features new grants, tools, and activities to implement the Student Access to Treatment Act of 2007 (DC Law 17-107). “I introduced this law to give DC students with asthma and anaphylaxis the security of immediate access to their potentially life-saving medications,” stated Catania. “I am pleased that today DC agencies, schools, families, healthcare providers, and community programs are joining forces for its implementation.”

In DC, asthma affects nearly 12% of children under age 18 (about 13,000 children), compared to a national rate of less than 9%. A recent RAND Health analysis reveals that asthma rates among DC children in Ward 5 (14.9%), Ward 6 (12.6%), Ward 7 (17.9%*), and Ward 8 (12.1%) in 2003 were on a par, or above, the DC average (*statistically significant difference from city-wide mean at .05 level). At Friendship Public Charter School in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8, 33% of elementary school students and 24% of middle school and high school students reported having asthma this year.

DC children ages 1-17 years averaged more than 4,200 emergency department (ED) visits to DC hospitals for asthma per year in 2002-2006, IMPACT DC reports. These visits tend to be highest in the fall (September-November) with the next-highest peak in the spring (March-May). With proper preventive asthma care, most ED visits and hospitalizations for asthma are avoidable.

The HSC Foundation President and CEO, Thomas W. Chapman, MPH, EdD, joined by Diana Bruce, Director of Health and Wellness, DC Public Schools (DCPS), presented Asthma Stars Recognition Awards to representatives of Friendship Public Charter School, Ballou Senior High School, and DCPS’ Department of Athletics. Dr. Chapman declared, “The HSC Foundation is delighted to recognize these school programs that have worked to improve the safety, care, and wellbeing of students with asthma by encouraging physicians and families to develop tailored asthma action plans, training staff, and establishing a student asthma club and asthma hip hop education program.”

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Each participating organization announced specific measures to address asthma, both within its own jurisdiction and in collaboration with partner organizations.

Pierre N.D. Vigilance, MD, MPH, Director, DC Department of Health, announced that the DC Department of Health is endorsing a standard DC Asthma Action Plan developed in collaboration with DC Public Schools, Children’s National Medical Center, and community partners and based on the updated National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute asthma care guidelines. With a section for school medication consent, this form also will serve as the valid medication action plan stipulated by the Student Access to Treatment Act of 2007. In addition, DOH is releasing a school emergency asthma and anaphylaxis poster to facilitate the posting of emergency response protocols by DC public, public charter, private, and parochial schools as required by the Student Access to Treatment Act of 2007.

Moreover, Dr. Vigilance today announced the awardees of the DC Department of Health’s two community asthma grants for new initiatives to address asthma among DC children and youth. Both programs are housed at Children’s National Medical Center:

- **IMPACT DC (Improving Pediatric Asthma Care in the District of Columbia)** is a nationally recognized model asthma education program that serves DC children and their families in the emergency department, and increasingly, in the community. With this grant, IMPACT DC is teaming with the Asthma and Allergy Foundation Maryland-Greater DC Chapter and with the Allergy and Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics to provide asthma education to students in 50 DC public and public charter schools this year, and

- **The District of Columbia Partnership to Improve Children’s Health Care Quality (DC PICHQ)** is a regional improvement partnership of both public and private healthcare providers that offers an organizational and city-wide infrastructure to plan and implement projects that improve health services and outcomes of DC children. With this grant, the DC PICHQ is spearheading a DC Childhood Asthma Quality Improvement Initiative to implement evidence-based best practices among a pilot group of pediatric primary care service providers.

The DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), a leading provider of sports and recreational activities for DC children and youth, is partnering with The HSC Foundation to provide an asthma and anaphylaxis training seminar for recreation services staff, coach’s clipboards with emergency action steps, and a new A Guide to Good Asthma Care brochure with tips and resources to help DPR constituents work with their healthcare providers for better asthma control.

The DC Public Schools is partnering with the DC Department of Health to train and certify school employees and agents to administer medications per the Student Access to Treatment Act of 2007. The two agencies also are distributing the new asthma/anaphylaxis emergency posters to schools.

*The Asthma Call to Action for DC Children and Youth is co-sponsored, in part, by The HSC Foundation with an unrestricted educational grant from AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals.*

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The HSC Foundation is dedicated to improving access to services for individuals with special needs who face challenging social and health care barriers, particularly in the Washington metropolitan area. The Foundation serves as the parent organization to The HSC Pediatric Center and a care coordination health plan, Health Services for Children with Special Needs, Inc. All three organizations comprise The HSC Health Care System.