

A SHIMA EVENT
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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
ASTHMA EVENT
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as prepared text**

Welcome and thank you, Dr. Ford, for that introduction -- and for being such a strong advocate for children at the American Lung Association. I know that this issue has special meaning for you. It's a pleasure to be back at Children's Hospital, and to join you, Secretary Shalala, Administrator Browner and all the children here -- to talk about a very serious health problem, and what we are doing together to safeguard and improve our children's health.

We've all heard this morning about how asthma is the most common medical threat to America's children -- and that the problem is getting worse. And that while the rise in asthma cases and deaths cuts across all ages and groups -- there's been an alarming increase in asthma in children -- particularly under the age of five.

That's the bad news. The good news is that we're making significant headway in meeting this chronic medical problem head on -- and that we're making that progress by working together -- as federal agencies, caregivers, health care providers, parents, and community leaders.

We've heard from Secretary Shalala and Administrator Browner about what the federal government is doing to increase research and expand health programs to combat and prevent asthma. This morning, I'm pleased to announce three new initiatives -- from both the private and public sector -- that will build on these successful efforts already underway.

The first initiative I want to talk about today is a pilot program to empower local citizens and communities to take voluntary steps to protect children from environmental health threats such as lead, second hand smoke, and other pollutants. The Child Health Champion campaign is being initiated by EPA, as part of that agency's overall effort to help identify, prevent, and reduce environmental health risks to children. And it will go a long way to address the underlying causes of asthma.

These pilot programs will take place in eleven selected communities around the country -- including here -- in Anacostia -- and will be supported with EPA seed money. Local communities will come together -- health care workers, teachers, citizen groups, business leaders, maintenance workers, and the government -- to help identify health problems, set goals, and develop action plans.

Information is another effective empowerment tool we have to help control and prevent asthma. With asthma affecting one in every 14 children, everyone -- children, parents, caregivers, teachers and the entire community -- needs to be informed about what can trigger it, its symptoms, and what to do about it. Getting this critical information out to the widest possible audience is the key to saving lives -- and improving the health of our children. And

that's what the following two initiatives seek to accomplish.

First, the American Lung Association and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies are joining forces to educate and train both parents and child care providers in how to cope with childhood asthma and other lung diseases. Among other activities, they will distribute to NACCRA's network of over 350,000 child care providers Sesame Street's -- "A is for Asthma" -- educational kit. This bilingual kit includes a caregivers guide, a video, and a poster that will help educate the entire community about asthma and how to improve our children's health.

The program has enlisted the help of some very important people: Sesame Street characters Elmo, Rosita and Luis. It also introduces a new Muppet friend -- Dani -- who has asthma. So I know the children here at the Hospital and across the country will enjoy this program -- and learn some important lessons from it as well.

The other initiative I want to mention arms parents and others with another kind of information they need to help protect children with asthma -- information about the quality of the air we breathe. As Administrator Browner has already pointed out, smog and pollution -- particularly in our cities -- can cause all kinds of health problems, and children, particularly asthmatics, are at high risk for adverse health effects from ozone pollution.

A new program-- called the Ozone Mapping Project -- for the first time makes information about ozone concentrations available daily to the public -- through the media, but perhaps more importantly -- on the Internet. This project -- initiated by the Environmental Protection Agency -- provides parents and communities with an important new "right to know" tool to help anticipate increased risks for asthma attacks and other health-related problems. It's particularly appropriate that this project is being launched today -- on the nation's first Ozone Awareness Day -- which is being organized by the states to raise public understanding about ozone and how it affects our health.

Taken together, these three initiatives signify an important step forward in our nation's battle to combat the problems of asthma that can so cripple a child's life -- and to ensure a cleaner, healthier environment for all of our children. We do not know exactly what causes asthma -- but we do know how to help prevent it and manage it. And if any illness illustrates that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of intensive care, asthma is it. By keeping parents and caretakers informed about asthma and what to do about it, and by empowering communities to improve the environment around them, we will continue to make progress -- and save lives -- in this critical area of children's health. I want to thank everyone here today for helping to improve the quality of life for so many of our youngest citizens.

And now, the fun really begins. Elmo and Luis are going to do a song and dance about asthma for us. Let's all give them a very warm welcome.