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**PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release**

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**Survey Results Released of New Inhaler Law**

The results of a survey on the use of inhalers by school children shows that most schools allow the children to keep their inhaler with them in class, but there are still a few schools that only allow children to keep their inhaler in the school office.

On March 24, 2004, House Bill No. 632 “Medical Inhalers—School Policy” was signed and passed. This bill allows school-age children to carry their inhalers and self medicate when necessary. The bill also stated that each school district was to adopt a policy that implemented the inhaler law by September 1, 2004.

During spring 2005, South Central District Health conducted a community assessment to measure public school implementation of the new inhaler law policy in a sample of ten Magic Valley schools. This was part of a state-wide assessment conducted by the Idaho Asthma Prevention and Control Program (IAPCP). The assessment had two parts: 1) A survey of parents in the district who have children with asthma attending public schools and 2) interviews with key staff of those schools.

“Surveys indicated that the majority of the schools reported having a written asthma-specific inhaler policy,” said Elvia Caldera, Asthma Program Coordinator for South Central District Health. “Some of these schools used a policy developed by South Central District Health and others used a generic medication policy. Most of the schools allowed the students to carry their inhaler in their backpack and keep a back-up inhaler in the office. However, there were a few schools that only allowed children to keep their inhalers in the office.”

The principal at Lincoln Elementary in Twin Falls developed a “buddy-system” in which, in the case of a student asthma attack, the student’s friend accompanies him or her to the office so he or she is not alone. Mrs. Olmstead, Lincoln Elementary Principal, has made it a priority to track children that need medical care plans while in school, especially those with asthma.

There were 33 parent surveys returned. In general, the majority of the parents did not have concerns with school-age children being allowed to carry inhalers, but a small number stated a

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preference for the inhalers to be kept in the school office. Some specific parental comments were:

Parent of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader: “I think that it needs to stay in the office or with the nurse. Chances are younger children will let friends use it or the child may use it too much.”

Parent of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader: “I’m afraid a schoolmate will take my son’s inhaler and try it on themselves, since we all can’t be watching every minute.”

Parent of a 5<sup>th</sup> grader: “In the case of an attack, every second counts. If the child has the inhaler with him/her it could save their life. If the office has the inhaler, it takes someone to go get it and the child could die!”

Parent of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader: “I have taught my daughter not to unnecessarily use her inhaler and not to share it with anyone.”

Parent of a 1<sup>st</sup> grader: “Teachers and staff need to be properly trained by a physician, who treats asthma patients, on the signs and symptoms of an asthma episode. They need to be trained on an annual basis and taught about ‘rescue’ meds and ‘maintenance’ meds. Children with asthma are more effective at self-medicating if the staff are properly trained and can help remind children to use their inhalers. The other children at school also need some exposure to why these inhalers are being carried and why they should leave them alone.”

As a result of this assessment, South Central District Health’s public health nurses are visiting all public schools to supply those interested with a copy of the District Health asthma policy.

“There is still much research that needs to be done to fully understand how to prevent, treat, and cure asthma,” said Caldera, “but with local and state efforts to educate about proper management, children with asthma can live healthy and active lives.”

For more information about the asthma survey results or about asthma in general, please contact South Central District Health at 737-5988.

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Link to Bill No. 632 “Medical Inhalers—School Policy”:

<http://www3.state.id.us/oasis/2004/H0632.html>

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