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***Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition* Responds to Recent Influenza Outbreaks**

BETHESDA, MD – February 12 - The recent influenza outbreaks across the country, resulting in at least one confirmed death of a child, is a stark reminder that the influenza virus is a serious disease and as widespread as ever.

The reality is that influenza hospitalizes more than 20,000 children younger than 5 years of age each year in the United States – and causes approximately 100 deaths. These statistics are particularly tragic because many childhood influenza infections are preventable through annual immunization; however, vaccination rates among children are dismally low.

“Annual influenza immunization is safe and protects our children from disease. Many children across our nation are vulnerable to influenza infection every year because they are not vaccinated,” said *Coalition* Chair Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS, 17th Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006), President of Canyon Ranch Institute and Distinguished Professor of Public Health, The University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.

The *Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition* is committed to increasing vaccination rates among children. Disturbed by low rates of only 20.6% among children recommended for the influenza vaccine, the *Coalition* recently issued a report outlining strategies for parents and health care professionals to help improve immunization rates among this vulnerable population. Two key findings of the report are: **offering influenza vaccinations at all medical visits**, and **making use of the full season** – vaccinating as soon as vaccines are available and also using every opportunity to vaccinate throughout the winter into February and March because the influenza vaccine continues to be of benefit while the virus circulates.

“We urgently need to make influenza prevention a national priority so that parents will take a simple, yet important step to protect their child’s health and have their children vaccinated,” said Carol J. Baker, M.D., President of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. “The *Coalition* initiatives provide parents and health care professionals with important information to encourage the vaccination of children and their close contacts.”

The *Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition* was established by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases to protect infants, children and adolescents from

influenza by communicating with "one strong voice" the need to make influenza immunization a national health priority. The *Coalition* seeks to address and improve the low influenza immunization rates among children.

Members represent 25 of the nation's leading public health, medical, patient and parent groups committed to protecting children's health and encouraging wellness. The *Coalition* is made possible through an unrestricted educational grant to NFID from sanofi pasteur.

More information about influenza immunization, including the new *Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition* Report, is available at www.PreventChildhoodInfluenza.org.

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