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Press Release

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****PHOTO ATTACHED!****

Fighting the Flu Before It Gets Here! EBRPSS Begins Free Flu Vaccinations for Approved Students

Baton Rouge, LA – On Monday, October 5, East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS) and the Health Centers in Schools (HCS) began an aggressive, proactive program to keep schools safe and healthy during the upcoming **seasonal flu season: free vaccinations for students with parental permission. The program kicked off at Winbourne (110 vaccinations) and Banks (60) elementary schools** on Monday and will continue at all area public schools as scheduled through mid November. **This is for seasonal flu, not swine flu;** federal stimulus funds paid for all the vaccines.

Winbourne Elementary School student Kyisha Lucas (*pictured, left*) took her vaccination in stride from nurse Shirley Fontenot (*right*). Vaccinations were less painful in the form of the **inhalant FluMist**. Injections probably will be available later for those who cannot take FluMist, such as students with immune diseases, asthma and other health issues. Otherwise, those children will have to be immunized with an injection by their family physician.

Last year's pilot program to vaccinate students for seasonal influenza in **East Baton Rouge Parish public schools** has paid off in big dividends this year as flu awareness and prevention is on the rise due to the influx of the swine flu (H1N1). **Now the East Baton Rouge Parish School System and Health Centers in Schools are well prepared for this year's higher interest in flu vaccinations** and, later, swine flu vaccinations, which should begin in the late fall. The seasonal flu vaccinations will end right before the Thanksgiving holiday.

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FLU VACCINATIONS/2

“Last year, the school district was a demonstration site for the state of Louisiana and immunized 8,000 children against influenza. This year, we hope to immunize 40 percent of the School System’s student body across its 83 campuses,” **Catchings** said. “This is one of the most important projects we do. The impact is not only for the children but the entire community. The reason is simple: research indicates if we immunize the children, we stop the spread of disease in their age group and across all age groups. This includes older citizens, where the effect is a 35-percent drop in flu cases, according to research.”

Informational packets are being released to parents now (and each week based on the date of the program going on at each school). The packets include a permission slip, which parents must fill out completely and sign for students to receive the free vaccination.

“This program will help us reduce the number of flu cases in the schools, community and families,” **Dilworth** said. “Just by vaccinating a child, we can help keep our schools and our community safe and healthy places for learning and growing.”

In the meantime, school officials are keeping areas sanitized and asking students to wash their hands often and cough into their arm. Also, they are asking that if any family member comes down with symptoms of the flu, family members should have them see a physician and keep them home until symptoms have passed for at least 24 hours after medication ends. If parents have students with a flu-like illness, they should contact the student’s school and their physician. To date, there have been 417 presumed H1N1 cases reported to the schools.

Health Centers in Schools contracts to provide health services to the school district. It now has 11 student health centers in local public schools, and school nurses attend to students in all remaining public schools in the parish.

For more information, contact Catchings at (225) 721-1748.

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