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“Operation Assist” Brings Katrina Victims Vital Help for Ongoing Health Care Needs

**New Mobile Medical Units Traveling from New York, Will Stop in
Washington D.C., on Way to New Orleans and Biloxi**

***Partnership of The Children's Health Fund and
Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health
Has Treated More Than 10,000 in Gulf Already***

(New York) – **December 1, 2005** – Three months have passed since Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and thousands are still struggling to get their lives back in order. A vital need for these victims is appropriate healthcare. With that in mind, **“Operation Assist” – The Children's Health Fund's (CHF) Hurricane Katrina relief effort** in partnership with the **Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University** – will deliver brand new Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) to be permanently located in Louisiana and Mississippi and establish new health care programs for the regions.

The Operation Assist Caravan, including two new MMUs and a Mobile Public Health Field Office, will be launched from New York City on **Thursday, Dec. 1**. The Caravan will stop in Washington, D.C. on **Friday, Dec. 2**, for a 10 a.m. press conference at Capitol Hill, and proceed to the Gulf Coast. The first MMU will be delivered to **New Orleans, La., on Monday, Dec, 5 at 10 a.m.** and the second to **Biloxi, Miss., at 3 p.m.**

This builds on the inaugural efforts of “Operation Assist,” launched over the Labor Day weekend this year. CHF joined with the Mailman School of Public Health to launch “Operation Assist” as a unique collaboration to provide immediate assistance to families in need. Music legend **Paul Simon and Irwin Redlener, M.D.**, who co-founded CHF 18 years ago to provide health care to poor and homeless children, delivered the initial

MMUs, borrowed from some of The Children's Health Fund's 17 locations across the country.

Since then, 13 of CHF's 17 locations have rotated staff, equipment and MMU's to aid Katrina victims. In the first two months, **“Operation Assist” treated more than 10,000 patients at 35 sites** around hurricane-ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi, and at evacuee sites in Houston, Dallas and Austin, Texas.

“With ‘Operation Assist’ we have made some significant strides in easing the pain of those devastated by the losses brought by Hurricane Katrina,” said Irwin Redlener, M.D., President of The Children's Health Fund and Director of the Mailman School's National Center for Disaster Preparedness. “But there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done, and these two new Mobile Medical Units will enable us help so many more people over the long term.”

With the delivery of one MMU to Louisiana, The Children's Health Fund will establish the New Orleans Children's Health Project, in affiliation with the Tulane University School of Medicine. The Mississippi MMU will establish the Mississippi Gulf Coast Children's Health Project, in affiliation with the Coastal Family Health Center Inc., of Biloxi, Miss. The two new programs will increase the number of CHF programs to 19, nationwide.

Each of the two 38-foot-long MMUs is a medical clinic on wheels, with two or three examination rooms, nurse's station, waiting and registration areas. They are also equipped with computers for recording and tracking medical and demographic information and these units will also be equipped with satellite and standard communications equipment. MMUs will be staffed by physicians or other primary care providers, nurses, registrars and drivers.

A Mobile Public Health Field Office is also being delivered to the region. The Field Office is designed to meet a variety of public health and emergency-related needs. It will enable “Operation Assist” to provide community and environmental issues faced by the hurricane victims, as well satellite communications capability.

“Operation Assist” will continue to bring significant public health expertise to the field, as well. These experts assist in the development of data collection methodologies, needs assessment, prevention and management of infectious diseases and understanding and meeting underlying public health challenges.

Major funding for “Operation Assist” has been provided by: United Health Foundation; Madison Square Garden; Paul Simon; The Ace Group; Carson Family Charitable Trust; The Tomorrow Foundation and Wyeth.

The Children's Health Fund (<http://www.childrenshealthfund.org>) is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing medical care to the nation's most medically underserved population – homeless and disadvantaged children, and advocacy for access to health care for all children.

The only accredited school of public health in New York City, and among the first in the nation, **Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health** (<http://www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu>) provides instruction and research opportunities to more than 850 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees. Its students and nearly 250 multi-disciplinary faculty engage in research and service in the city, nation, and around the world, concentrating on biostatistics, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, health policy and management, population and family health, and sociomedical sciences.

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