



Columbia University  
MAILMAN SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND LAUNCH  
"OPERATION ASSIST"—MOBILE MEDICAL UNITS PROVIDING  
EMERGENCY SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE AREAS  
HARDEST HIT BY HURRICANE KATRINA**

**MUSIC LEGEND PAUL SIMON AND DR. IRWIN REDLENER,  
CO-FOUNDERS OF THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND,  
TO MEET MOBILE UNITS ON SITE WHEN THEY ARRIVE IN BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI**

(New York & Biloxi, MS) – September 5, 2005 – **The Children's Health Fund** and the **National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health** today announced the launch of **Operation Assist**, a unique collaboration to organize programs supporting health and public health needs during the current crisis. **Operation Assist** will provide direct health services to children and families in the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina through custom-designed, fully equipped, state-of-the-art mobile medical units (MMUs) developed by The Children's Health Fund.

Music legend **Paul Simon** and **Irwin Redlener, MD**, arrived in Biloxi, Mississippi to survey the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and to meet the **Operation Assist** MMUs as they arrive at the Coastal Family Health Center, which had been damaged by Katrina. Mr. Simon co-founded The Children's Health Fund (CHF) – a children's health and advocacy organization that has been providing comprehensive healthcare to medically underserved communities throughout the U.S. – with Dr. Irwin Redlener, associate dean at the Mailman School and director of its National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP).

**Operation Assist** will address the critical need for immediate medical services, as well as bring significant public health expertise into the field by providing needs assessment; prevention and management of infectious disease; data collection and analysis for long-term planning. Mental health professionals will also be included in teams, as available.

"NCDP and CHF believe that there will be a long-term need for medical support services, well beyond the acute needs related to the direct consequences of the hurricane," stated Dr. Irwin Redlener. He added, "We are also certain that the rebuilding of the healthcare infrastructure will be a lengthy process, and mobile facilities in certain communities might be of extreme value in the short- and long-term."

A similar program was organized following Hurricane Andrew in 1992, and the combined CHF / NCDP team has extensive relevant experience in disaster response, including 9/11 in NYC and international disasters.

Stated Paul Simon, "This is a heartbreaking, unbearable tragedy. I'm hoping that our efforts, along with the efforts of so many others, will make a difference for those who are suffering."

Potential target communities for these programs include areas directly hit by Hurricane Katrina, as well as those immediately adjacent. In addition, large numbers of evacuees will need substantially increased health services capacity in the communities to which they are relocated, including States that were not affected directly by the storm. **Operation Assist** will have two MMUs available, with the first arriving in Biloxi on Monday, September 5.

Each MMU is approximately 35 feet long, is self-contained and includes 2-3 examination rooms, nurse's station, waiting and registration areas and appropriate generators. All units are also equipped with computers for recording and tracking of medical and demographic information. They will also be equipped with satellite and standard communications equipment. The MMU can be deployed anywhere with accessible roadways.

MMUs will be staffed by physicians or other primary care providers, nurses, registrars and drivers. These personnel will be drawn from existing CHF national staff and, potentially, from other institutions as well.

#### **How to help:**

**To contribute to Operation Assist, please go to [www.childrenshealthfund.org](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org).**

**The National Center for Disaster Preparedness** at the Mailman School of Public Health is an academically-based, inter-disciplinary program focused on the nation's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorism and major disasters. NCDP provides curriculum development in bioterrorism, training for public health professionals and other first responders, development of model programs, a wide-ranging research agenda and public policy analysis around issues germane to disaster preparedness. [www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu](http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu)

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** 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. [www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu](http://www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu)

**The Children's Health Fund**, founded in 1987, is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing medical care to the nation's most medically underserved population – homeless and disadvantaged children. To date, The Children's Health Fund's national network of 17 pediatric programs has treated more than 350,000 children. [www.childrenshealthfund.org](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org)

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