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### Local Immunization Coverage Improved Dramatically

Local health departments are celebrating encouraging results from the CDC National Immunization Survey (NIS) released September 14, 2006. Houston immunization coverage rate for children up to 35 months of age has improved to 76.6 percent, up from 61.7 percent in 2004.

“Sustaining and furthering these gains will ensure our children are protected from potentially deadly vaccine preventable diseases, such as measles, pertussis and polio,” stated Elizabeth Love, Chief of the HCPHES Office of Policy and Planning.

"We are pleased that our efforts of the past several years are finally paying off for children," says HDHHS Immunization Bureau Chief Risha Jones. The 14.9 point increase is the largest of any state or local survey this year.

The NIS is an annual survey of state and major urban area immunization coverage measuring the percentage of children under the age of three years who have received the 15 recommended doses for protection from disease. The survey is conducted annually on the 50 states and 37 cities or counties. Historically, Houston has ranked near the bottom of the survey; this year Houston ranks 37 out of 87 surveys.

The survey evaluates the immunizations of children born between February 2002 and July 2004. The survey provides vaccination coverage estimates for children 19 through 35 months of age. State and local rankings are based on the percentage of children completing the 4:3:1:3:3:1 series of immunizations. That series includes four doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP), three doses of polio vaccine, one dose of measles-containing vaccine, three doses of Hib vaccine, three doses of hepatitis B vaccine and one dose of varicella vaccine.

Houston and Harris County health officials have encouraged CDC to conduct a county wide survey as is done in other localities and are implementing strategies to improve immunization services throughout the area.

Local strategies to improve immunization coverage include:

- Increasing use of the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry and the Texas ImmTrac Registry by immunization providers;
- Promoting medical homes for pediatric patients;
- Enrolling health care providers in the Vaccines for Children program (a program that provides vaccines for physicians for their un and under insured patients)
- Promoting and conducting reminder/recall services for parents whose children are due immunizations;

- Implementing Peers Educating Providers, a "best practices" physician training program

According to Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Executive Director, Herminia Palacio, MD, MPH, "These results are just the beginning. We have moved to the next level of partnership with health care providers, schools and the business community to achieve our ultimate goal-immunize every child on time, every time."

"The immunization time clock starts over with every birth in Houston. We are not as high as we hope to be but it feels much better being above average than near the bottom," says HDHHS Director Stephen Williams.