

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Students with Diabetes Continue to Face Challenges Securing Care in Schools

American Diabetes Month highlights ADA's 'Safe at School' campaign

Alexandria, VA (October 23, 2006) – With November's American Diabetes Month a reminder of the increased prevalence of diabetes in the United States, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) continues to work with families to ensure that students with diabetes receive appropriate care while at school. Students with type 1 diabetes require multiple daily insulin administration with a syringe or insulin pump, and students with type 2 diabetes may require oral medications and/or insulin. Insulin and some oral medications must be continuously balanced with food intake and appropriate level of exercise to avoid dangerous hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and hyperglycemia (high blood sugar). Younger, less experienced children need help with routine diabetes care tasks; other students can do routine care tasks by themselves. However, all students with diabetes need access to help and support in case of a diabetes emergency.

Some schools in the United States are doing an effective job in meeting the needs of students with diabetes. Yet, in many other schools, students are not able to effectively manage their disease at school and school-sponsored activities, and are therefore at risk for short-term and long-term complications. At many schools, there is no one to help a child in the event of a diabetes emergency. Many students are told they cannot attend a field trip or play school sports unless a parent accompanies the child or stays on site for practice, while some children are told they cannot attend their neighborhood school and have to be bussed for an hour across town to a school that staffs a full-time nurse. Families throughout the country have worked with ADA to meet their diabetes school care challenges. ADA's Safe at School campaign - supported by the medical and scientific expertise of the ADA - has helped provide families and educators with the resources they need and has helped to inform teachers and their school personnel that they can be trained to safely meet the needs of children with diabetes.

"Diabetes must be managed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A student with diabetes cannot take a break from diabetes when he or she boards the school bus in the morning." said Linda M. Siminerio, RN, PhD, CDE, and Chair of ADA's Safe at School Task Force. "It's vital that they and their parents know they will be in a medically safe environment that affords them the same educational opportunities as other students."

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The school nurse plays a central role in providing diabetes care in the school setting and the ADA strongly supports having a nurse in every school. Unfortunately, most schools don't have full-time nurses, many have no nurses at all, and almost none have nurses available for extracurricular activities or field trips. Yet the need for diabetes care -- especially in the possibility of a potentially life-threatening diabetes emergency -- is constant. Non-medical school personnel can be easily trained to provide the help needed, and many schools are already successfully using trained non-medical school personnel to supplement the diabetes care provided by a school nurse.

ADA believes that all school staff need to have a basic understanding of diabetes and know who to contact in an emergency; that there needs to be a small number of school staff members trained to perform diabetes care tasks, including insulin and glucagon administration when the school nurse is absent or unavailable; and that students who are able to do so must be allowed to self-manage their diabetes during all school activities.

In recent years, ADA has worked with families throughout the country to help them confront issues involving diabetes care in their schools. Among its efforts, ADA has:

- Developed a strategy to help parents, health care professionals, and others advocate on behalf of children with diabetes through the 4-step process: educate, negotiate and, when necessary, litigate and legislate to protect the safety of students with diabetes. The "Becoming a Diabetes Advocate in the Schools" brochure may be found at www.diabetes.org/Advocacy/school_brochur.pdf.
- Developed sample 504 plan and diabetes care plans – a plan developed to meet the requirements of a federal law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. The sample plans are available for downloading at <http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/school/504plan.jsp>.
- Conducted school advocacy workshops through its Family Resource Network, diabetes camps, and conferences to educate parents and others about parents' rights and about schools' responsibilities to provide appropriate care to students with diabetes.
- Provided a legal advocate to discuss a particular school or daycare problem. ADA also has established a network of volunteer lawyers to assist parents whose situations require litigation.

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Diabetes is one of the nation's most prevalent, debilitating, and costly diseases. Nearly 21 million children and adults in the United States have diabetes, and if present trends continue, one in three Americans, and one in two minorities, born in 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime.

The American Diabetes Association is the nation's leading voluntary health organization supporting diabetes research, information and advocacy. The Association's advocacy efforts include helping to combat discrimination against people with diabetes; advocating for the increase of federal diabetes research and programs; and improved access to, and quality of, healthcare for people with diabetes. The Association's mission is to prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of all people affected by diabetes. Founded in 1940, the Association provides service to hundreds of communities across the country. For more information please call the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) or visit www.diabetes.org. Information from both these sources is available in English and Spanish.

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