



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

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JEFFREY D. KLEIN July 18, 2011

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BRONX, N.Y. – Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, (D-Bronx/ Westchester), and New York City School Chancellor Dennis Walcott were joined by parents, community leaders, educators, and healthcare professionals to unveil a multi-pronged plan to fight asthma in the Bronx.

Asthma is the most common chronic disorder in children and, in recent years, has become the leading cause of hospitalization among children in New York. The Bronx has one of the highest asthma rates in the country, with an asthma hospitalization rate that is 70 percent higher than the rest of the city and 700 percent higher than the rest of New York State. Educators have also found asthma to be a major cause for chronic absenteeism in New York City schools.

“This affliction has not only taken our childrens' health hostage, it is holding their education for ransom,” Senator Klein said. “What we have developed is a comprehensive strategy to detect local environmental triggers that cause asthma attacks, educate parents on how to treat asthma at home, and keep kids in the classroom and out of the hospital.”

"When a student is sick, they either miss class or struggle to learn," Chancellor Walcott said. "We need to do everything we can to make sure students attend school so that by their senior year they will be prepared for college and career. The NYC Asthma Friendly Schools Campaign was launched to help reduce asthma-related absences and improve asthma awareness, prevention and management. I want to thank Senator Klein for his leadership on this issue and we look forward to reviewing his report."

This asthma-fighting initiative includes:

DETECTION:

At Senator Klein's urging, the state Department of Environmental Conservation this past weekend deployed air monitors for the first time ever in North Eastern Bronx. Four separate thoroughfares – Interstate 495/295, the Cross Bronx Expressway, the Hutchinson River Parkway, and the Bruckner Expressway – run through this area, while two near-by bridges – the Whitestone and the Throggs Neck – are used by more than 40 million motorists each year.

Yet, despite the high concentration of asthma-causing exhaust fumes, the greater Throggs Neck area had not previously been selected for DEC air quality testing.

Senator Klein and Community Board #10 worked with the DEC to have temporary air monitors placed at the Locust Point Civic Association and the Throggs Neck Houses. They have been running all weekend and are currently on their way to a lab for analysis. These results will help determine if environmental factors have led to a prevalence of asthma in this area.

Additionally, Senator Klein has sponsored a free asthma screening today at the Locust Point Civic Association. Roughly 40 children signed up for screenings, which are to be performed by trained nurses and respiratory therapists from Jacobi Medical Center/North Central Bronx Hospital and St. Barnabus Hospital. The screenings will test if a child is not breathing properly and is in need of a complete examination. Parents will also be given information on how to care for a child's asthma at home.

EDUCATION:

Chancellor Walcott recently announced a new citywide campaign to reduce asthma-related absenteeism in schools. Roughly 17 percent of students have been diagnosed with asthma.

The program includes:

- **Creation of a School Asthma Ambassador Corps:**
This program will have trained school employees reach out to families in schools with high asthma rates and help them fill out the necessary asthma consent form to provide emergency care at school for their children
- **New 311 Student Asthma Assistance:** 311 will provide students and parents with information on asthma management in schools, and will provide the location of the closest health clinic for non-emergency medical assistance.
- **Expansion of the American Lung Association's (ALA) Open Airways Program For Schools:** We will strengthen the partnership between school leadership and school health teams to improve asthma management of students. This nationally recognized program helps elementary school students manage asthma, decrease asthma emergencies, and raise

asthma awareness among families and school personnel.

- **Parent Summits at Schools with High Asthma Rates:** Participating schools will hold parent summits that will provide training about asthma prevention and management.
- **Provide New Training to Physical Education Teachers in Management and Prevention of Asthma among Students.**
- **Family Shelters to Receive New Asthma Prevention and School Attendance Training:** The DOE and the Mayor’s Task Force will launch additional initiatives designed to improve attendance and asthma management at shelters with families of school-age children.

PREVENTION:

Senator Klein has introduced new comprehensive legislation to fight the spread of asthma and help reduce the skyrocketing healthcare costs associated with asthma related treatment.

This legislation, as detailed in a report released today by Senator Klein, “**Asthma Prevention and Management in Bronx, New York and New York State at Large,**” would in part:

- Provide for a program of asthma disease management and control within the State Department of Health;
- Require teachers in public and non-public school systems across New York State to be trained in identifying and responding to asthma emergencies in accordance with standards to be prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Health;
- Reduce exhaust exposure to school-age children by expanding a preexisting ban on idling vehicles on school grounds to privately owned automobiles. It would also expand this idling prohibition to private schools.
- Limit the use of chemicals in public buildings and schools known to exacerbate asthma symptoms;

- Expand existing programs designed to combat childhood obesity to also include strategies to curtail incidence of asthma and related conditions.
- Create an asthma tracking program to identify trends in the times, places and demographics of those afflicted with asthma to collect information for the basis of continued addressing of asthma.

Senator Klein will also be sponsoring a training session at the Locust Point Civic Association July 27, from 6 p.m. to 8:00 p.m that will help community groups apply for state environmental justice grants, which are offered by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, that can be used for asthma-fighting efforts in their neighborhoods.