



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Liliana Esposito, The Food Allergy Project, Inc.  
(212) 681-1380 office or (917) 941-4225 cell

## FIGHTING FOR A FOOD ALLERGY CURE

### PARENTS, DOCTORS TO GOV'T: INCREASE FUNDING, SAVE LIVES

Children's Memorial Hospital, University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital & Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine Join Crucial Call To Action

*June 7, 2006, Chicago, IL* – Threatening American lives at a dangerous pace, severe food allergies are increasing among newborns and children so rapidly that parents and scientists are struggling to understand and address this debilitating condition. Leading researchers, concerned parents and educators gathered today at Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital to call on Congress to fund scientific research of food allergies to combat this life-threatening disease and to save children's lives.

They collectively looked to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the federal government's lead agency for medical research, and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), NIH's main arm for allergy research, to increase the level of research funding devoted to severe food allergies from less than \$10 million dollars per year to \$50 million per year by 2009.

David Bunning, local Chicago businessman and founder of *The Food Allergy Project* with his wife Denise, a former elementary school teacher who runs a support group for more than 200 families in the Chicago area, called on the federal government to increase the desperately required funding for the sake of millions of American children like their sons Bryan, age 12 and Daniel, age 9 who needlessly suffer from this potentially preventable or reversible condition.

David Bunning, whose sons have life-threatening allergies to milk, eggs, nuts and shellfish, said, "This is about more than one family's story. Severe food allergies affect millions of Americans. When I realized the lack of resources dedicated to this disease, I knew we had to go public. Private funding is helpful, but it's not enough. This illness has increased at such a dramatic pace that we can't keep up without federal funding."

Standing with the Bunnings in this critical call to action were Dr. Jacqueline Pongracic, Head of Allergy at Children's Memorial Hospital, Dr. Steve Goldstein, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital and Director of the Institute for Molecular Pediatric Sciences at the University of Chicago, Dr. Robert Schleimer, Chief of the Allergy-Immunology Division at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and dozens of families, community leaders, activists and support group members.

This was the inaugural event for *The Food Allergy Project* – a national coalition of parents, researchers, educators and experts who have come together to demand more federal resources dedicated to food allergy research, and spur the scientific studies necessary to save children's lives. In addition to partnering with the above mentioned Chicago institutions, *The Food Allergy Project* has supported important research at Duke University, Children's Hospital in Boston, and Mt. Sinai

-- more --

in New York, directly funding more than \$15 million in food allergy research. Yet federal leadership is needed to keep pace with the alarming rate of food allergy increase.

Dr. Pongracic noted that rates of food allergy among children have skyrocketed in her pediatric practice. “Just 10 years ago, food allergic children represented only a small portion of my practice, but today, more than half of my patients are food allergic. While research hospitals are always grateful for the kind of private funding that we receive from organizations like *The Food Allergy Project*, to truly attack this illness and find effective treatments or a cure, the federal government needs to get involved and dedicate serious funding to the issue.”

Dr. Goldstein said, “University of Chicago geneticists, biochemists and clinicians have embraced *The Food Allergy Project’s* energizing focus on discovery of treatments and cures.” He added, “Important answers to the most basic questions crucial to understanding severe food allergies are looming on the horizon, but there is still much work to be done. History has shown us that when research institutions collaborate and are supported by federal dollars, new treatments are not only possible, but probable.”

“Today, food allergy research is where asthma research was 30 years ago,” said Dr. Schleimer. “This illness is devastating and we believe that new treatments are possible within the next five to 10 years, but we need adequate federal funding to conduct this potentially life-saving research.”

Denise Bunning urged Congress to help food allergic children lead normal, healthy lives. “As a mother, my greatest wish is for my sons to be freed from the life-threatening burdens of this disease,” she said. “Imagine fearing for your child’s life every time he walks out the door. Millions of children just like mine suffer every day.”

More than 11 million Americans – 4.3 million of whom are children – suffer from serious food allergies. According to a 2004 study of school nurses, there are, on average, ten children suffering from food allergies in every American elementary school. And in five short years, the rate of peanut allergy among children doubled, a rate of increase rarely seen among non-infectious diseases.

Accidental consumption, contact or even air-borne exposure to certain foods can cause people with food allergies to react within seconds. The greatest danger is to undergo anaphylactic shock, which results in swelling of the airway, loss of blood pressure, and potential death within minutes. Such reactions are responsible for more than 150 deaths and tens of thousands of emergency room visits and hospitalizations every year.

Currently, no cure exists for food allergies. Strict avoidance of allergenic foods is the only choice, a weighty task given that the most common allergens – such as peanuts, eggs, milk and soy – are staples of our food supply and difficult to avoid completely. The sole weapon available to some in life-or-death emergencies is a shot of epinephrine – a drug which was discovered in the late 1800s. The Food Allergy Project believes that food allergic children deserve better.

[www.FoodAllergyProject.org](http://www.FoodAllergyProject.org)

###