

# Long Beach Press Telegram

## Health fair talks of asthma in Long Beach

Problem is prevalent in L.B.

By Kristopher Hanson

Staff writer

**Saturday, January 22, 2005 - LONG BEACH** — When the wheezing starts, Anthony Acosta's routine begins.

Twice a day, the 8-year-old North Long Beach resident sets aside several minutes to administer the asthma inhaler he depends upon to keep him breathing freely.

Diagnosed as asthmatic as an infant, Anthony describes the feeling of an impending attack.

"My lungs start to hurt, and I can't breathe, and I can't go outside and do things until it goes away," he said.

His mother, Araceli, who also suffers from asthma, said she was diagnosed after moving to Long Beach 15 years ago. Her husband and two other children are unaffected.

Mother and son were among the dozens who attended an asthma-awareness health fair at the Carmelitos Housing Project Saturday. Parents and their children learned about the respiratory illness' causes, triggers, treatments and effects.

Because of poor air quality, medical studies show that asthma rates among children in Long Beach are twice the national average, with nearly 22,000 children under the age of 18 suffering from the disease throughout the city.

Long Beach Unified School District nurses report asthma as the No. 1 cause of student absenteeism.

Health experts are divided over why rates are higher here, but some point to pollution from diesel-powered ships and trucks in the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

At Saturday's event, health care experts from the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma, and Miller Children's Hospital, offered free advice and health-care tips for asthmatics.

The nonprofit alliance offers classes on how to deal with asthma and can assist indigent asthmatics with obtaining health care. The alliance also offers free visits to the homes of asthmatics to teach them which household chemicals and pollutants can trigger an attack.

Allergist Jud Schoendorf, who treats asthmatic kids at clinics in Long Beach, said the disease is treatable but requires constant care.

"Typically, the earlier they get started on treatment, the better off they'll be," Schoendorf said. "With the medicines and knowledge we have today, most asthmatics can live a fairly normal life and do all the things a healthy person can do, but with some minor adjustments."