

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Spring allergies and asthma a balancing act for over two million Canadians**

- Patient associations launch national program to help sufferers -

**Toronto, Ontario - (April 4, 2007)** – Just like the game Jenga<sup>®</sup>, where players have to strike the right balance with wooden blocks, for those with asthma and seasonal allergies, commonly known as hay fever, the spring kicks off a season of balancing acts.

For the 75 per cent of asthmatics who have seasonal allergies<sup>1</sup>, each spring day is a balancing act of managing medications and steering clear of environmental triggers to avoid emergency room visits and asthma attacks.<sup>2</sup>

Pollens begin to reach peak levels across Canada around the month of March, when people with seasonal allergies often experience more severe symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Seasonal allergies are often triggered by pollen from trees in early spring, followed by grasses in late spring and weeds throughout the spring and summer.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Keep Your Balance**

To raise awareness about the link between asthma and seasonal allergies this spring, the Asthma Society, the Family Physician Airways Group of Canada (FPAGC) and the Allergy/Asthma Information Association (AAIA) have teamed up to create the *Keep Your Balance* campaign. Using numerous resources including brochures, advertisements, and a Web site, the campaign is designed to help patients affected by both conditions understand how to manage their symptoms and enable them to enjoy their daily lives.

"Having both asthma and seasonal allergies can be quite a challenge, says Dr. Alan Kaplan, a family physician and the chair of the FPAGC, a group of primary care physicians who are committed to helping those with airway diseases lead a full life. "Untreated seasonal allergies also prevent full asthma control. Some patients may balance three to four different medications at a time and still experience problems breathing. If we can simplify our patient's treatment and control both their symptoms and their disease, we will all benefit," says Dr. Kaplan.

#### **One Airway – One Disease**

Scientists now believe that asthma and allergic rhinitis (commonly referred to as allergies) may actually be different facets of the same disease which is known as the "One Airway, One Disease" concept.<sup>4</sup> Both are diseases of the airway caused by inflammation and may be seen as a continuum, from top to bottom of the breathing system. Inhaling irritants, like pollen, may provoke an allergic reaction in the delicate lining of the nose area, while airborne asthma irritants may cause inflammation further down the airways.

Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma (ARIA), a group working in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), has provided the first set of guidelines which can be used worldwide. The recently published ARIA guidelines recommend:

- Patients with asthma should be appropriately evaluated (history and physical examination) for rhinitis (irritation and inflammation of the nose);
- A combined strategy should be ideally used to treat co-existent asthma and allergic rhinitis.

“The Keep Your Balance campaign is about finding the right equilibrium when living with asthma and seasonal allergies – from balancing different medications to balancing outdoor activities to minimizing environmental triggers,” says Frank Viti, chief executive officer for the Asthma Society.

### **More than just sniffles**

A survey conducted in 2006 among people with asthma who also suffer from seasonal allergies, found that quality of life is significantly affected as a result of coping with this condition. Of the 244 Canadians surveyed by Decima Research, many respondents say seasonal allergies interfere with a good night of sleep (43 per cent), hinders participation in leisure and sporting activities (33 per cent), and disrupts their ability to enjoy social activities (27 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to how seasonal allergies impact their asthma, 25 per cent of respondents indicate they have more asthma attacks, and 35 per cent turn to higher doses of medication to control their asthma, indicating that for many Canadians, their seasonal allergies and consequently their asthma, is not under control.<sup>6</sup>

“Not only does my hay fever leave me feeling tired and lethargic, it also triggers my asthma,” says Andrea Kenney, who has lived with asthma and seasonal allergies for the past 41 years. “I feel short of breath for months at a time which compromises my ability to work, and limits my enjoyment of any outdoor activity,” says Ms. Kenney. “By checking with my doctor each year just prior to spring pollen season, I have found solutions which allow me to balance both my asthma and allergies. It is important that patients discuss this with their doctor.”

“The Keep Your Balance campaign is about ensuring people like Andrea have the best possible information to help them keep their symptoms under control, so they can live their lives,” says Mary Allen, chief executive officer of the AAIA.

To learn more about asthma and seasonal allergies, please go to [www.asthma.ca](http://www.asthma.ca) or [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca).

-30-

### **For more information, please contact:**

Ethan Pigott  
Cohn & Wolfe  
(416) 924-5700 ext. 4059  
[ethan\\_pigott@ca.cohnwolfe.com](mailto:ethan_pigott@ca.cohnwolfe.com)

Oxana Latycheva  
VP Operations  
The Asthma Society  
(416) 787-4050 ext. 108  
[olatycheva@asthma.ca](mailto:olatycheva@asthma.ca)

Mary Allen  
Chief Executive Officer  
Allergy/Asthma Information Association  
(514) 694-0679  
[maryallen@sympatico.ca](mailto:maryallen@sympatico.ca)

### References

<sup>1</sup> Allergic Rhinitis and its impact on Asthma, ARIA Workshop Report, *J Allergy Clin Immunol*, s198

<sup>2</sup> Allergic Rhinitis and its impact on Asthma, ARIA Workshop Report, *J Allergy Clin Immunol*, s147

<sup>3</sup> <http://allergies.about.com/cs/season/a/aa032700a.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.medicalgrid.org/eng/user/pages/4\\_phase/asthmaallergy.htm](http://www.medicalgrid.org/eng/user/pages/4_phase/asthmaallergy.htm)

<sup>5</sup> About the poll: The Decima Research poll was conducted between August 17th through September 11th, 2006 via the Decima teleVox, a national weekly omnibus telephone survey. Results are based on a sample of 244 Canadians who suffer from asthma and allergic rhinitis, accurate to within +/-6.4%, 19 times out of 20.

<sup>6</sup> About the poll: The Decima Research poll was conducted between August 17th through September 11th, 2006 via the Decima teleVox, a national weekly omnibus telephone survey. Results are based on a sample of 244 Canadians who suffer from asthma and allergic rhinitis, accurate to within +/-6.4%, 19 times out of 20.

Jenga<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of Pokonobe Associates and is used with permission. All rights reserved.  
© 2007 Hasbro. All rights reserved.