

For Immediate Release

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IMPACT OF ARTHRITIS ON CHILDREN STILL UNDERESTIMATED

ATLANTA, June 18, 2007- Of the 46 million Americans affected by arthritis, most often overlooked are the nearly 300,000 children who are also affected by the disease. Juvenile Arthritis (JA) is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases, yet it often goes under the radar undetected or misdiagnosed. If left untreated, irreversible joint damage may occur. Compounding the problem is the critical need for pediatric rheumatologists who are trained to diagnose and treat children and youth with arthritis.

“JA is a difficult disease to diagnose as many people do not think that children can get arthritis. The early symptoms which can include joint pain, stiffness and swelling are often thought to be simply “growing pains,” said Patience White, M.D., chief public health officer, Arthritis Foundation. “Early diagnosis is essential. There are treatments available today that if started early can prevent a lifetime of disability.”

Obtaining the correct diagnosis and treatment is also complicated by the declining number of pediatric rheumatologists. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, there are 218 practicing pediatric rheumatologists in the U.S., which is a doctor-patient ratio of 1,376 patients to every one specialist. There are currently 13 states without any practicing pediatric

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rheumatologists, causing many children and their families to travel long distances just to seek treatment. These costs for families add to the \$128 billion dollar price tag that arthritis costs the economy each year.

While there is no known cure yet, there has never been a more optimistic outlook for children with juvenile arthritis. “Today finding out what kind of arthritis the child has and starting early treatment with the new therapies is key to preventing significant disability in later years.” said White.

As Juvenile Arthritis Month approaches in July, the Arthritis Foundation seeks to raise awareness of juvenile arthritis, the warning signs that accompany it and the critical need for pediatric rheumatologists. In addition, the Arthritis Foundation will host the annual nationwide Juvenile Arthritis conference July 1-4, 2007 at Hershey Lodge in Hershey, Pa. Kids with arthritis, pediatric rheumatologists, arthritis researchers and Arthritis Foundation medical experts will gather for various sessions designed to give up-to-date, valuable information about treatments for this serious disease and support to help overcome the obstacles for all those affected by juvenile arthritis. For more information on the Juvenile Arthritis conference, visit www.arthritis.org.

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About the Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation is the leading health organization addressing the needs of some 46 million Americans living with arthritis, the nation's number-one cause of disability. Founded in 1948, with headquarters in Atlanta, the Arthritis Foundation has multiple service points located throughout the country.

The Arthritis Foundation is the largest private, not-for-profit contributor to arthritis research in the world, funding more than \$380 million in research grants since 1948. The foundation helps individuals take control of arthritis by providing public health education; pursuing public policy and legislation; and conducting evidence-based programs to improve the quality of life for those living with arthritis. Information is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-800-283-7800 or www.arthritis.org.

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