

**For Immediate Release**

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**Contact:** Lisa Mader

(601) 359-3227

## **Mississippi Health Benefits No Longer Requires Waiting Period**

Jackson, Miss. – The Office of the Governor, Division of Medicaid has been given approval to put into place a zero waiting period for Mississippi Health Benefits also known as the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP. "We are finding that a significant number of Mississippi families could not take advantage of this money-saving program because of the old six month waiting period," said Medicaid Executive Director Rica Lewis-Payton. "Now these qualifying families no longer have to fear the potential consequences of their children not having health insurance and can sign up immediately."

Mississippi is now one of the few states in the nation to be able to offer the Children's Health Insurance Program with a zero waiting period according to the federal Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). Governor Musgrove continues to urge that every eligible child immediately be enrolled in this program because not insuring our children keeps them at risk. "My administration will not let up. We are committed to giving all Mississippians the opportunity for better health care while protecting families from high medical costs. We are encouraged that the new zero waiting period will help us enroll more Mississippi families in Mississippi Health Benefits."

According to CHIP Coordinator Maria D. Morris, "It is critical at this time to encourage families to apply now in order for all Mississippi children to have access to quality health care." The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is a joint federal/state program that provides health insurance coverage to low-income uninsured children. Benefits under CHIP include all benefits under the State and School Employees' Health Insurance Plan as well as vision and hearing screening, eyeglasses, hearing aids, immunization, preventive dental care, and routine dental fillings. No pre-existing condition is excluded.

The Office of the Governor - Division of Medicaid, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Finance and Administration jointly administer the Plan. The Division of Medicaid receives and distributes federal and state funds and handles the overall management of the Program. Medicaid contracts with the Department of Human Services to determine eligibility for the Program and with the Health Insurance Management Board, acting administratively through the Department of Finance and Administration, to administer the separate insurance plan that provides health insurance coverage to eligible children. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi currently provides this health insurance coverage.

For direct information, parents may call 1-877-543-7669 to discuss eligibility or to obtain an application.