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Out Of The Blue

Leading Jazz Vocalist Maysa Leak Shares Her Personal Struggle with Prematurity

New York, NY, June 22, 2004 – Prematurity has been on the rise, yet it is an event for which most parents are not prepared. Today in New York City, world-renowned jazz vocalist **Maysa Leak** partnered with **PreemieCare** to discuss how prematurity affects millions of families in the United States as well as her own experience four years ago – when she delivered a son 15 weeks early, six thousand miles away from home.

Maysa joined a panel of medical experts, including **Steve Berman M.D.**, FAAP, past President of the American Academy of Pediatrics, to share information parents of premature babies need to know when they leave the hospital. “While having a child prematurely is often unexpected, parental concerns should not be,” says Dr. Berman. “Education and dialogue with healthcare providers can help parents understand how to manage the health risks facing their young infants.”

In an average week in the United States, there are more than nine thousand babies born before the 37th week of gestation and nearly fifteen hundred babies born at less than 32 weeks of gestation.¹ That means that one out of every eight babies is premature. Despite these alarming statistics, many new parents are unaware of what they need to do to keep their premature baby healthy.

Out of the Blue?

Celebrated for her soulful voice and lyrics, Maysa’s CD, titled “Out of the Blue”, takes its name from a popular song she wrote the night her son was born at only six months gestation. Maysa was inundated with information shortly after her delivery but learned about some of the risks of prematurity the hard way. After her son was discharged from the hospital, she learned about respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) when he was diagnosed with the virus. Fortunately he did not require hospitalization, but the doctor prescribed a monthly shot to help prevent future serious RSV illnesses. RSV is the most common cause of lower respiratory tract infection in children under five years of age² and the number one reason for hospitalization of children under the age of one.³ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that every year up to 125,000 children are hospitalized with a serious case of RSV disease.⁴

“I wrote ‘Out Of the Blue’ to capture the emotional journey that I faced when my son Jazz was born,” said Maysa. “It was a frightening prospect to imagine his life being threatened by RSV. My mission is to use my voice, both through music and speech, to reach out to other mothers of premature babies, educating them about prematurity, RSV and the steps parents can take to help protect their babies.”

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Health Care for Premature Infants

Because premature birth interrupts the final stages of lung development, premature infants are at greater risk for developing serious respiratory problems than full-term children. Diane Stanton, RN, encourages parents to follow some simple tips that can reduce some of those risks, including contracting serious RSV disease. "Use the term **CARES** as a guideline. **C**lean hands before touching the baby. **A**sk your friends and relatives not to visit if they have a cold, fever or sore throat. **R**espiratory illness: know the signs and symptoms of lower respiratory disease, including RSV. **E**ducate: Inform yourself, family and friends about what to expect raising a premature baby. **S**moking: do not allow anyone to smoke in your home," says Ms. Stanton. "These tips could help smooth the transition from hospital to home."

Prematurity may come out of the blue, but as Maysa Leak found out, being educated is the key to making it through an unexpected event.

About Maysa

Renowned jazz vocalist, Maysa Leak began singing when she was a three-year-old. Years later, she auditioned for Stevie Wonder and worked on his project, the Jungle Fever Movie Soundtrack. Soon after, Maysa found herself in London as the lead vocalist for an acid-jazz band, Incognito. Maysa has achieved international success and still sings for the band as well as performs on her own.

About RSV

RSV is a common, highly contagious and potentially serious virus. Virtually all children are exposed to RSV during their first two years of life and re-infection throughout life is very common. Premature children and babies with chronic lung disease or congenital heart disease are at increased risk for serious complications from RSV.

Initially, the symptoms of RSV may be similar to a cold and may include: fever, runny nose, and coughing with difficulty breathing, difficulty eating, wheezing (a whistling sound), rapid breathing, and a blue color around the lips. An infected baby can get very sick, very quickly. Since RSV complications can strike rapidly, parents of at-risk children need to act fast by calling their pediatrician or healthcare provider immediately if signs of RSV complications appear.

There is a medication, Synagis[®] (palivizumab), that is indicated for the prevention of serious lower respiratory tract disease caused by RSV in pediatric patients at high risk of RSV disease. Synagis[®] is a humanized monoclonal antibody licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1998. Synagis[®] is given through a simple intramuscular injection, which can be administered in the healthcare provider's office once a month during the RSV season. Synagis[®] has been used safely in thousands of babies. Adverse events with Synagis[®] may include upper respiratory tract infection, ear infection, fever, and runny nose. Very rare cases of severe allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis (<1 case per 100,000 patients) and hypersensitivity reactions have been reported. Synagis[®] should not be used in patients with a history of a severe prior reaction to Synagis[®] or its components.

For more information about RSV, parents can call 1-877-848-8512, visit the PremieCare website at www.MOSTonline.org, or visit the RSV web site at www.rsvprotection.com.

PreemieCare, a division of MOST (Mothers of Supertwins), an international non-profit organization, is dedicated to educating and supporting parents of premature infants. The RSV education and awareness campaign has been developed under an unrestricted grant from MedImmune, Inc.

MedImmune is a leading biotechnology company focused on researching, developing and commercializing products to prevent or treat infectious disease, autoimmune disease and cancer. MedImmune actively markets four products, Synagis(R) (palivizumab), FluMist(TM) (Influenza Virus Vaccine Live, Intranasal), Ethyol(R) (amifostine) and CytoGam(R) (cytomegalovirus immune globulin intravenous (human)), and has additional products in clinical testing. MedImmune employs approximately 1,800 people, is headquartered in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and has additional operations in Frederick, Maryland, as well as Pennsylvania, California, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. For more information on MedImmune and full prescribing information, visit the company's website at www.medimmune.com.

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 - ² Shay, DK, Holman, RC, Roosevelt, GE et al. *J. Infect. Dis.* 2001;183;16-22.
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 - ⁵ Holman RC, Shay DK, Curns AT, et al. Risk factors for bronchiolitis-associated deaths among infants in the United States. *Pediatr Infect Dis J.* 2003;22:483-9.
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 - ⁷ McConnochie KM, Roghmann KH. *Am J. Dis Child.* 1986;140:806-312.
 - ⁸ Keeping Children Safe: A Study About Minority Parents' Knowledge and Awareness of RSV, 2003 Harris Interactive Survey, Conducted by PreemieCare.

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