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## **Ski Helmet Use Research Team Receives \$20,000 Grant From Vermont Health Foundation**

BURLINGTON, VT-- The Vermont Snow Sports Research Team has received a \$20,000 grant from the Fletcher Allen Community Health Foundation to expand the PHAT (Protect your **H**ead on **A**ll **T**errain" and "Protect your **H**ead at **A**ll **T**imes) program, aimed at significantly increasing voluntary ski helmet use among children to prevent serious head injuries.

The grant, administered through UVM, will enable the team to build upon a successful collaboration with the Vermont Ski Areas Association (VSAA) to continue expanding the program to ski resorts across Vermont. For 2009, participating ski areas include Smuggler's Notch, Bolton Valley, Bromley, Jay Peak, Sugarbush, Okemo, Mad River Glen, Stratton, Stowe, Cochran's and Mount Snow.

"We are very thankful to the Fletcher Allen Community Health Foundation for their continued support of our project," said Dr. Robert Williams, leader of the research team, a partnership between the University of Vermont College of Medicine and the Vermont Children's Hospital at Fletcher Allen Health Care. "This generous donation will help us continue promoting the positive advantages of wearing a helmet, which should absolutely be part of every skier's and snowboarder's routine gear. This grant will help us achieve our goal of getting every skier and snowboarder to wear a helmet every time they hit the slopes in Vermont, ensuring our skiing is not only the best in the nation, but also the safest."

Dr. Williams is a pediatric anesthesiologist and a critical care specialist at Vermont Children's Hospital at Fletcher Allen. He is also an associate professor at the University of Vermont College of Medicine.

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A 1999 report by the Consumer Product Safety Commission revealed that 7,700 head injuries could be prevented every year if all skiers and snowboarders wore helmets on the slopes. Spurred on by this report, in 2002 the Vermont Snow Sports Research Team began researching helmet usage at Smugglers' Notch Resort in Jeffersonville, with some additional data gathered at Bolton Valley and Bromley resorts.

The project has been very successful with nearly 90% of children now in helmets at Smugglers' Notch, up from 60% in the 2002-2003 season. Helmet use for adults has also shown large increases, with over 70% of the program's most targeted adult skiers and riders now using helmets, up from 30% on the 2002-2003 season. The study is based on more than 75,000 observations of skiers and riders over the last six winters. "With this grant, we intend to reach tens of thousands of additional skiers and snowboarders, many of whom come to Vermont's ski resorts from other places," Williams said. "This means that we will be able to spread our message about the importance of helmets far beyond the borders of our state."

The funding will also allow the team to expand the reach of the PHAT program in other ways. The PHAT team has developed a marketing campaign designed to appeal to young skiers and boarders that encourages safe helmet use and this year is partnering with ski retailers to designate them as "PHAT Phriendly" stores, and they are also placing brochures, stickers and posters in all twenty roadside Vermont Welcome Centers. The team plans to once again hold "PHAT Days" at participating resorts this year, where skiers can pick up free stickers, brochures and other educational materials highlighting the importance of helmet use. At some resorts, skiers can enter a raffle to win new helmets.

"The Vermont Snow Sports Research Team is doing important work," said George Chaffee, chair of the Vermont Health Foundation Board, which also oversees the Fletcher Allen Community Health Foundation. "Helping them to expand this project throughout Vermont is consistent with the Foundation's role to encourage healthy lifestyles among Vermonters. We are very pleased that the Fletcher Allen Community Health Foundation could award this grant."

#### About PHAT

The Vermont Snow Sports Research Team, a partnership of Vermont Children's Hospital at Fletcher Allen Health Care and the University of Vermont College of Medicine, is actively engaged in increasing voluntary ski helmet use among children and adults to prevent serious head injuries through the PHAT (**P**rotect your **H**ead on **A**ll **T**errain" and "**P**rotect your **H**ead at **A**ll **T**imes) program. The research and marketing project is **supported by the** Vermont Children's Hospital at Fletcher Allen, the Vermont Ski Areas Association, the Vermont Health Foundation, The Children's Miracle Network, the UVM College of Medicine, and the Epilepsy Foundation of Vermont.

About the Fletcher Allen Community Health Foundation (FACHF)

Established in 2000 as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding between Fletcher Allen Health Care and the Vermont Health Foundation, the FACHF combines funding received from both organizations to fund community-based efforts that advance the missions of both organizations. The Board of the Vermont Health Foundation approves funding guidelines and grant awards on behalf of the FACHF.

About the Vermont Health Foundation

Founded in 1983, the Burlington-based Vermont Health Foundation invests its sponsorship funds in efforts and initiatives focusing on prevention and wellness. Its mission is to be a catalyst for community health improvement.

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