

State hails results of hepatitis B drive

By JIM WITTY
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State health officials say they are pleased with the results of a nine-month campaign to immunize Hawaii fifth-graders against hepatitis B.

More than 11,000 youngsters, almost 80 percent of the state's fifth-graders, were inoculated against the highly infectious virus this school year. That's up from 5 percent at the beginning of the school year, Department of Health spokesman Patrick Johnston announced today.

"It's quite remarkable that we began with a group of children of whom only a small portion were immunized against hepatitis B and, in the space of a single school year, increased the portion who are protected to almost 80 percent," said Health Department Director Dr. Lawrence Miike. "What makes this achievement even more impressive is the fact that each child had to receive not one, but a series of three shots, during a nine-month period."

Of those children returning consent forms, 95 percent completed the series of three shots, Johnston said. Most of the kids who didn't get immunized either attend private schools that didn't



By CRAIG T. KOJIMA, Star-Bulletin

Health Director Lawrence Miike, center, sits in a fifth-grade class with Kaipo Tan, left, and Nicole Kapoi, right, at Kauluwela Elementary School this morning.

get involved because of liability concerns or are public school students who didn't return signed consent forms, he said.

As an incentive, fifth-grade classes with 100 percent participation received a party and prizes; 137 classes reached the goal and collected a basket of prizes, games and food, Johnston said. This morning, Department of Health officials joined with fifth-graders from Kauluwela Elementary School for a celebration and

to announce the results of this year's "Take 3 Hep B Campaign."

If left unchecked, hepatitis B can cause severe liver problems and death. Each year, about 5,000 people in the United States die of liver failure related to hepatitis B and 1,500 die of hepatitis B-related liver cancer, Johnston said.

The state has requested additional funding this year to provide free hepatitis B vaccines to all fifth-graders during the 1997-99 school years.