

Asthma in California

Asthma makes it hard for many of California's children to live, learn, and play.

- ▶ In California, about 1 in 6 children under 18 years of age has been diagnosed with asthma. This is higher than rates found in the United States overall. These figures likely underestimate the true prevalence of asthma.

HOSPITALIZATION

- ▶ Between 160 and 204 out of every 100,000 children under the age of 15 are hospitalized each year in California because of asthma. This comes to over 14,000 hospitalizations per year.

DISABILITY

- ▶ Nationwide, disability due to asthma among children under 18 has increased by 232% over the past 3 decades. Disability from asthma has increased more than twice as fast as disability from other causes during this time. (Disability refers to substantial limitations in age-appropriate activities.)
- ▶ Asthma is the most common cause of disability among children nationwide.

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

- ▶ Nationwide, approximately 14 million school days are missed every year due to asthma, a rate of nearly 4 days per child with asthma per year. Nearly a quarter of children with asthma miss school some time during the year due to asthma.
- ▶ In California, about half (49.5%) of children with current asthma missed at least one day of school in the past year due to asthma.

HEALTH DISPARITIES

- ▶ The hospitalization rate for asthma in California is more than three times higher for African American children than for other children.
- ▶ Currently in California, there are 1.3 million Latinos, including approximately 600,000 Latino children, who suffer from asthma. Since Latinos are currently the state's fastest growing ethnic group and will eventually account for the majority of Californians, the potential impact of asthma on California and this population is enormous.
- ▶ Nationally, children in low-income families are more likely to have been diagnosed with asthma than children in families who are not poor.

ASTHMA COSTS CALIFORNIA LOTS OF MONEY

- ▶ Asthma hospitalizations cost \$667 million in California in 2004.
- ▶ The average cost per stay for asthma in California was \$19,093 in 2004. Of these stays, 35.4% are paid through Medi-Cal.

POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS MEAN MORE ASTHMA ATTACKS

We do not yet know how to cure asthma, but sick days, hospitalizations, and emergency room use are largely preventable. Through a combination of consistent health care, appropriate use of medications, and decreased exposure to environmental triggers that aggravate asthma symptoms, prevention can be achieved.

Many environmental pollutants have been implicated in causing or worsening asthma and new information is accumulating rapidly. Among these, the evidence is the most consistent for:

- ▶ Air pollution created from vehicular traffic, especially diesel traffic, and some industrial processes;



(over)

- ▶ Poorly maintained schools and substandard housing that expose children to mold, dust, and cockroaches; and
- ▶ Secondhand smoke from cigarettes.

Concern is also increasing about the role exposure to respiratory irritants and chemicals affecting the immune system may play in asthma, including:

- ▶ Some cleaning products; and
- ▶ Pesticides.

COMMUNITIES ACROSS CALIFORNIA ARE TAKING ACTION TO HELP OUR CHILDREN BREATHE EASIER

Many communities face dilapidated schools, poor housing conditions, and outdoor air pollution from nearby industries and freeways. Families alone cannot initiate large-scale changes to improve their children's environments and reduce the frequency of their asthma attacks. There is a need to develop effective strategies to reduce asthma triggers through viable public policy. Policy change provides a long-lasting, far-reaching way to reduce environmental triggers.

Community Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA) is a network of asthma coalitions in California working to shape local, regional, and state policies to reduce the environmental triggers of asthma for school-aged children where they live, learn, and play. Please go to our website at www.calasthma.org to learn more about Community Action to Fight Asthma, connect with local coalitions, locate asthma resources across California, and sign up for our newsletter.

REFERENCES (for detailed footnotes, please visit www.calasthma.org)

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