



## UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH

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### **REPORT INDICATES POOREST CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH ASTHMA MOST LIKELY TO END UP IN EMERGENCY ROOMS**

#### *Fall, winter months, present challenges for those with asthma*

LOS ANGELES, CA—At a time when many of us are closing our windows and turning up the heat a new report, released today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, reveals that more than 330,000 Californians visit emergency rooms at least once a year because of asthma symptoms. The new study, titled *Asthma in California: Findings from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey*, found that nearly 140,000 of these visits are by children, who are more likely than adults to visit emergency rooms for asthma. The report based on data collected by the 2001 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS 2001) demonstrates the extraordinary burden of asthma attacks on individuals, families, and children. The in-depth study was funded by The California Endowment, a statewide health foundation dedicated to expanding access to health care services, and is available online at [www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all people with asthma receive flu shots. Children and adults with asthma are at increased risk of complications from the flu, such as hospitalization or pneumonia. CDC figures also show that flu shots for Latinos and African Americans lag well behind their white counterparts.

“During this time of year, people spend more time indoors, where asthma sufferers are more likely to be exposed to certain environmental triggers such as tobacco smoke, pollutants generated by fuel-burning appliances, dust mites, chemicals, animal dander, cockroaches and molds that can set off an attack,” said report lead author Ying-Ying Meng, senior research scientist with the Center. “Californians can minimize the burden of asthma by receiving appropriate prescriptions and education, as well as avoiding asthma triggers.” Meng went on to say that communities, health care providers, schools, workplaces, and state and local governmental agencies must work together to address the asthma epidemic.

The report found that nearly 3 million Californians with asthma suffer from symptoms; approximately 667,000 are school-aged children ages 6-17. Nearly 750,000 Californians experience asthma symptoms every day or every week.

More than half of the adolescents age 12-17 with asthma who suffer shortness of breath and other symptoms of asthma every day or every week missed one or more days of school in a month (54 percent). Even

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a little more management seems to make a difference in this area, because the absentee rate is almost half that number (32.8 percent) for adolescents with asthma who suffer these symptoms less than once a month.

Children from very low-income families--\$18,000 per year for a family of four--are twice as likely to end up in emergency rooms as children from more affluent families. Very low-income adults are nearly three times as likely to depend on emergency rooms for asthma treatment. Latinos and African American children are also more likely to visit the emergency room.

"The majority of these asthma emergencies are preventable. Even with the best clinical management, children with asthma face major challenges if their home, child care facility, school, recreational or outdoor environments contain substances that can trigger an asthma attack," explained Diane Estrin, project director of Community Action to Fight Asthma, a three-year program funded by The Endowment to help improve the indoor and outdoor air quality and environments where children live, work and play. The Endowment believes that in order to see a major difference in reducing the incidence of asthma, California should adopt or better enforce policies to ensure better indoor/outdoor air quality.

Parents, school nurses, teachers, and other employees, as well as child-care providers are important links in the asthma management chain. They should be especially prepared to remove hazards to protect children from asthma attacks. At the same time, adults also can do more to manage their own breathing difficulties by becoming aware of the triggers that present the greatest hazards to them, then reducing and avoiding exposure to these triggers.

In addition to describing emergency room use for asthma in California, *Asthma in California: Findings from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey* also includes information on the prevalence of asthma in California, access to care for Californians with asthma, and disparities in and consequences of frequent asthma symptoms.

### Among the report's other specific findings:

- Almost a half a million people with asthma in California have no health insurance.
- About a million adults with asthma reported that they experienced delays in receiving or did not receive care.
- One in four children and adults with asthma who experience delays in health care for their asthma end up in the emergency room. One in five children who experienced delays in care for their asthma have the symptoms every day or every week (20 percent) compared with 10 percent of those who did not experience delays in care.
- 38,000 children with asthma under the age of 12 have not seen a physician in at least a year. An additional 130,000 children experienced delay or have gone without care.
- Of those children who experienced daily or weekly asthma symptoms, 54.3 percent said they limited their play and sports, while only 17.9 percent of those who had symptoms less than once a month were likely to limit their physical activities.

The report provides several recommendations including improving control of asthma through the reduction of environmental triggers, reducing disparities in the burden of asthma, and suggesting community-based, culturally appropriate interventions. Adequate education about asthma management and access to sufficient

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medications and equipment, along with improved living environments are needed to reduce the disproportionate burden of asthma among low-income families, racial and ethnic groups, and the uninsured.

The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is a collaboration of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Health Services and the Public Health Institute. The California Department of Health Services, The California Endowment, the National Cancer Institute, the California Children and Families Commission, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Indian Health Service funded the survey.

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#### **Online Resources:**

- California Health Interview Survey: [www.chis.ucla.edu](http://www.chis.ucla.edu)
- UCLA Center for Health Policy Research: [www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu)
- UCLA School of Public Health: [www.ph.ucla.edu](http://www.ph.ucla.edu)
- The California Endowment: [www.calendow.org](http://www.calendow.org)

#### **Other Resources for Comment:**

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