

## BACKGROUND ON EPA'S ASTHMA PROGRAM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is committed to safeguarding human health and the environment. Asthma is a serious, life-threatening respiratory disease that affects an estimated 25.7 million Americans. Rates of asthma have risen sharply over the past thirty years, particularly among children ages 5 to 14. In response to the growing asthma problem, EPA created a national, multifaceted asthma education and outreach program to share information about environmental factors – found indoors and outdoors – that trigger asthma. Although there is no cure, asthma can be controlled through medical treatment and management of environmental asthma triggers. EPA's goal is to reduce exposure to asthma triggers and improve the quality of life for millions of people with asthma.

Asthma can be controlled through medical treatment and management of environmental triggers. EPA promotes scientific understanding of environmental asthma triggers and ways to manage them by partnering with local, state and federal agencies, universities, the health care community, nonprofit organizations, the media, and many other groups. EPA collaborates with partners to support scientific research and educate the public about asthma and ways to manage environmental asthma triggers.

### To improve the quality of life for the millions of Americans living with asthma, EPA:

- Monitors outdoor air quality and informs the public of health risks from outdoor air pollution.
- Helps children with asthma and their families learn how to manage environmental asthma triggers in and around their homes.
- Empowers school communities and childcare providers to protect children from environmental asthma triggers in and around places where children spend their time.
- Increases public awareness about asthma and managing environmental asthma triggers.
- Conducts and coordinates research to increase scientific knowledge about asthma and ways to manage environmental factors that cause asthma and trigger attacks.
- Provides health care providers and insurers with information, education and resources to incorporate environmental management into clinical practices and standards of care for asthma patients.
- Supports community-based asthma initiatives to improve asthma health outcomes and help transfer knowledge across community programs.

Source: EPA, *Working Together So Everyone Can Breathe Better*; National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief: Trends in Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality: United States, 2001-2010.

## About Asthma

Asthma is a lung disease characterized by inflammation or swelling of the lining of the airways. It causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, or nighttime or early morning coughing. Asthma is common among children and teens, but anyone can have asthma. Although there is no cure for asthma yet, with proper care people with asthma can lead a healthy, productive, fully active life. Good asthma care includes working with a health care provider to create a written action plan, reducing exposure to environmental triggers, and taking the proper medications. The good news is there are many resources available to help people with asthma right in their own community. School nurses, local health departments, asthma coalitions and consumer advocacy groups are good places to start.

Learn more about what communities are doing to help people with asthma at [AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org](http://AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org).

## Asthma in the U.S.

- An estimated 25.7 million people, including approximately 7.1 million children, have asthma.
- 9.5 percent of children in the United States have asthma.
- In a classroom of 30 students, 3 are likely to have asthma.
- Nearly 13 million people reported having an asthma attack in the past year, representing over half the people who had asthma.
- Asthma is the third ranking cause of hospitalization among children under 15.

## Asthma and the Environment

- Dust mites, cockroaches, pet dander, molds, secondhand smoke, ozone and particle pollution can cause asthma attacks.
- Exposure to secondhand smoke can cause asthma in pre-school aged children.

## Health Impacts

- Asthma leads to nearly 2 million emergency room visits and 3,600 deaths per year in the U.S.
- Asthma accounts for nearly 10.5 million missed school days and 10 million missed work days.
- The annual economic cost of asthma, including direct medical costs from hospital stays and indirect costs such as lost school and work days, amount to more than \$56 billion annually.

## Disparities

- Asthma prevalence is higher among families with lower incomes.
- African-Americans have higher rates of asthma emergency room visits, hospitalizations and deaths than Caucasians.
- Puerto Ricans have the highest prevalence of asthma among all ethnic groups.

Sources: American Lung Association, *Trends in Asthma Morbidity and Mortality* (2010), <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>; US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey reports (2009), [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_10/sr10\\_247.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_247.pdf); National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, *Morbidity and Mortality Chartbook*, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/docs/cht-book.htm>; National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief: Trends in Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality: United States, 2001-2010; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011, May), Asthma in the U.S. Vital Signs. Retrieved February 13, 2012, from <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/Asthma/>; and Akinbami L. Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use and Mortality: United States 2005-2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr032.pdf>.

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

Provides information on environmental asthma management, as well as free education and outreach documents.

Web: <http://www.epa.gov/asthma>

### **AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org**

AsthmaCommunityNetwork.org is a growing network of community programs committed to improving the lives of people with asthma. The Network provides an opportunity to share, learn and connect with local and national leaders and gain access to hundreds of tools and resources to support asthma management programs.

Web: <http://www.asthmacommunitynetwork.org>

### ***EPA Smoke-free Homes and Cars Program***

Information and resources on preventing secondhand smoke exposure to children under six.

Web: <http://www.epa.gov/smokefree>

### ***EPA Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program (IAQ Tools for Schools)***

Provides information and guidance for how to improve IAQ management in schools.

Web: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools>

### **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

Provides information on asthma statistics, state and local asthma control programs, and summaries of asthma interventions.

Web: <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma>

### **National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI)**

Coordinates the National Asthma Control Initiative (NACI), a program of the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program. The NACI is a multi-component, mobilizing, and action-oriented initiative that aims to align asthma patient care with evidence-based recommendations.

Web: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/lung/asthma/naci/discover>