



MARYLAND  
Department of Health

**Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities**

**August Priority Focus Area Feature Article**

***Asthma***

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**What is Asthma?** Asthma is an inflammatory condition of the bronchial airways, which are the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. This inflammation causes the normal function of the airways to become excessive and over-reactive. These changes produce airway obstruction, chest tightness, coughing and wheezing. If the symptoms are serious, this can cause severe shortness of breath and low blood oxygen.

**What Causes an Asthma Attack?** Inflammation of the airways is the common finding in all asthma patients. This inflammation is produced by allergy, viral respiratory infections, and airborne irritants among others.

**What are the Risk Factors?** Asthma is more common in children than adults. More boys have asthma than girls, but in adulthood, more women have asthma than men. Although asthma is a problem among all races, blacks have more asthma attacks and are more likely than whites to be hospitalized for asthma attacks and to die from asthma.

**Disparities**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, in 2015, almost 2.6 million non-Hispanic blacks<sup>1</sup> and 2.2 million Hispanics<sup>2</sup> reported that they currently have asthma.

The prevalence of asthma has increased in the general population over the past two decades. While deaths from asthma are relatively rare, the death rate for Puerto Ricans was 400% higher than the non-Hispanic White population. Children have higher asthma rates than adults, and in particular, African American children have an 80% higher prevalence of asthma than White

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/content.aspx?lvl=3&lvlID=532&ID=6170>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/content.aspx?lvl=3&lvlID=532&ID=6173>

children. Children from low income families also are more likely to have asthma.<sup>3</sup>

### **Quick Stats<sup>4</sup>**

- African Americans are three times more likely to die from asthma than non-Hispanic Whites.
- American Indians/Alaska Natives were 20% more likely to be diagnosed with asthma, in 2008.
- American Indians/Alaska Natives are 30% more likely to be diagnosed with asthma.
- Puerto Ricans have over twice the asthma rate as compared to the overall Hispanic population.
- Puerto Ricans are four times more likely to die from asthma than non-Hispanic Whites.
- Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders are 10 percent more likely to have asthma than non-Hispanic Whites.

### **Combating Adolescent Asthma Disparities in Maryland**

MHHD provides funding and technical assistance to the St. Mary's County Health Department to provide services to children 2-18 years old diagnosed with asthma. The program focuses on minority groups living in Lexington Park and Great Mills and provides home-based, multi-trigger, multi-component interventions with an environmental focus to decrease numbers of missed days of school, steroid courses and hospital visits due to asthma. Addressing these barriers will lead to improved health outcomes, decreased ED utilization, and decreased costs to the healthcare system.

Based on St. Mary's final report for FY18, there was a 16.2% decrease in children missing 5 or more school days, and a 10.1% decrease in children who had to use their oral steroids more than twice over the course of 6 months of enrolling into the program.

For more information on the St. Mary's County Asthma Control Program, please visit: <http://www.smchd.org/asthma/>.

Reach out to MHHD for more information on our efforts to reduce asthma rates in Maryland at [MDH.HealthDisparities@Maryland.gov](mailto:MDH.HealthDisparities@Maryland.gov) or 410-767-7117.

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<sup>3</sup> President's Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children. Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities, 2012.

<http://www.epa.gov/childrenstaskforce/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/content.aspx?ID=6461>