



Air Pollution & Respiratory Health Content

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At-A-Glance 1999

Asthma is one of the most common and costly diseases in the United States. More than 5% of the US population has asthma and the numbers are growing. The need to respond to this problem is increasingly urgent.

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Scope of Problem

Asthma currently cannot be cured, only controlled. Asthma is a long-term, often progressive disease in which the airways become temporarily blocked. Those affected have episodes of breathing difficulty when their airways become inflamed, and they are more sensitive to a variety of "triggers" for breathing problems. These triggers include dust, tobacco smoke, cockroaches, and some chemicals. A long-term, multifaceted approach is required to prevent and manage asthma. This includes educating, treating, and providing continual medical care and monitoring for people who have asthma; changing behaviors that lead to asthma or worsening of asthma; and eliminating or avoiding asthma triggers.

Asthma's Impact is Large. The number of asthma sufferers has more than doubled from 6.7 million in 1980 to 17.3 million in 1998. An estimated 4.8 million are children. Asthma is hitting hardest and disproportionately among poor, inner-city dwellers. Collectively, people who have asthma experience well over 100 million days of restricted activity each year, and asthma is believed to be the most common reason that students miss school. In 1995, more than 5,000 Americans died from asthma.



(Click to see graph of asthma prevalence)

Asthma's Costs Are Large. Asthma accounts for nearly 500,000 hospitalizations each year. Asthma deaths have tripled over the past two decades. Despite improvements in clinical treatment, visits to emergency rooms and hospitalizations due to asthma are increasing. It is estimated that by the year 2000, asthma-related costs will exceed \$14.5 billion.

