

## Asthma in Children Fact Sheet

- Asthma is the most common chronic disorder in childhood, currently affecting an estimated 6.2 million children under 18 years; of which 3.9 million suffered from an asthma attack or episode in 2004.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2003, asthma accounted for an estimated 12.8 million lost school days in children. It is the leading cause of school absenteeism attributed to chronic conditions.<sup>2</sup>
- Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under the age of 15. Close to 39 percent of all asthma hospital discharges in 2004 were in those under 15, however only 21 percent of the U.S. population was less than 15 years old.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2002, 641,242 emergency room visits were due to asthma in those under 15.<sup>4</sup>
- Current asthma prevalence in children under 18 ranges from 5.7 percent in South Dakota and Idaho to 11.9 percent in Delaware.<sup>5</sup>
- Asthma is characterized by excessive sensitivity of the lungs to various stimuli. Triggers range from viral infections to allergies, to irritating gases and particles in the air. Each child reacts differently to the factors that may trigger asthma, including:
  - respiratory infections, colds
  - allergic reactions to allergens such as pollen, mold, animal dander, feathers, dust, food, and cockroaches
  - vigorous exercise
  - exposure to cold air or sudden temperature change
  - cigarette smoke
  - excitement/stress
- Within the last few years, mortality and hospitalizations due to asthma have decreased and asthma prevalence has stabilized, possibly indicating a higher level of disease management.
- Asthma medications help reduce underlying inflammation in the airways and relieve or prevent airway narrowing. Control of inflammation should lead to reduction in airway sensitivity and help prevent airway obstruction.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. Raw Data from the National Health Interview Survey, U.S., 2004. (Analysis by the American Lung Association, Using SPSS and SUDAAN software).

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. Raw Data from the National Health Interview Survey, U.S., 2003. (Analysis by the American Lung Association, Using SPSS and SUDAAN software).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. National Hospital Discharge Survey 2004 and data provided upon special request to the NCHS.

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, 2003. (Analysis by the American Lung Association, Using SPSS and SUDAAN software).

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. Raw Data from the National Survey of Children's Health through State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey, 2003.