



Asthma's Impact on California

Recent Data from the California Breathing Asthma Program

California Department of Public Health

February 2013

1 in 8
Californians
has asthma

Each year,
asthma causes
11.8 million
days of missed
work and
1.2 million days
of missed
school

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways in the lungs. During an asthma attack, airways become inflamed, making it hard to breathe. Asthma attacks can be mild, moderate, or severe – and even life threatening. There is no cure for asthma. People with asthma can manage their disease by avoiding triggers and using prescribed medication.

What triggers asthma?

We don't know for sure what causes asthma, but we do know that attacks are sometimes triggered by allergens (e.g., pollen, mold, animal dander, and dust mites), exercise, occupational hazards, tobacco smoke, air pollution, airway infections, chemicals, strong odors, and others.

How widespread is asthma in California?

- 3.7 million adults and 1.2 million children have been diagnosed with asthma (1 in 8).
- 2.2 million adults and 692,000 children have current asthma (1 in 13).¹
- Each year, there are 189,700 new cases of asthma—approximately 93,150 among adults and 96,550 among children.
- Over 974,000 adults have asthma that has been caused or aggravated by their work, but work-related asthma (WRA) often is not recognized or diagnosed.

¹ A person has current asthma if s/he has been diagnosed with asthma by a health care provider and reports symptoms of having asthma. Not everyone with asthma continues to have asthma symptoms.

This report summarizes more detailed data provided in a 2013 comprehensive report, "Asthma in California: A Surveillance Report." The full report can be found at: <http://californiabreathing.org/asthma-data/burden-report>.



Edmund G. Brown Jr., Governor
State of California

Diana S. Dooley, Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency

Ron Chapman, Director
California Department of Public Health
State Health Officer



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In 2010,
there were:
34,796
asthma-related
hospitalizations
and
179,972
asthma-related
ED visits

Asthma costs
California
\$11.3 billion
per year

What is the impact of asthma on people who have it?

- Approximately 649,000 adults with current asthma (36.4%) miss work or are unable to carry out their usual activities because of their asthma. This translates to 11.8 million days of work/usual activities missed per year.
- Approximately 129,000 children with current asthma (52.3%) miss school or day care because of their asthma. This translates to 1.2 million days of school/day care missed per year.
- Over one in five Californians with current asthma have very poorly controlled asthma.
- Asthma impact and impairment are greater for adults with WRA than non-WRA.
- In 2010, there were 179,972 asthma emergency department (ED) visits and 34,796 asthma hospitalizations in California.
- In 2009, there were 415 deaths due to asthma—more than one per day.

What are the costs associated with asthma?

- In California, asthma costs are estimated at \$11.3 billion per year, including:
 - \$9.6 billion in direct health care costs
 - \$1.5 billion in work and school days lost
 - and \$251 million in productivity loss due to premature deaths.
- Total charges for asthma hospitalizations in 2010 were over \$1 billion (including \$155.6 million for repeat hospitalizations.)
- The average charge per asthma hospitalization more than doubled between 1995 (\$13,247 in 2010 dollars) and 2010 (\$33,749).
- Medicare and Medi-Cal covered 65% of asthma hospitalizations and 50% of asthma ED visits in 2010.

What do we know about Californians exposure to asthma triggers?

- 296,000 adults and teens with current asthma are smokers.
- 208,000 adults and 41,000 children with current asthma are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home.

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- On average, people with asthma are exposed to 2-3 asthma triggers in the home (e.g., mold, cockroaches, rodents, pets, carpeting, wood burning or gas appliances, and tobacco smoke).
- 1.2 million people with current asthma are renters, which can impact a resident's ability to reduce exposure to asthma triggers in the home.
- 547,000 adults with current asthma live in multi-unit housing, where asthma triggers may pass from one unit to another.
- People with WRA are most commonly exposed to the following asthma triggers in the workplace: dust, unknown chemicals, cleaning materials, smoke, mold, paint, and other indoor air pollutants.

Who is more likely to have asthma?

Race and Ethnicity:

- Compared to Whites, Blacks have 40% higher asthma prevalence, four times higher asthma ED visit and hospitalization rates, and two times higher asthma death rates.
- Asthma prevalence among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) adults is 1.5-2.0 times higher than among White adults.
- As one combined ethnic group, Hispanics have comparatively low asthma prevalence. However, among Puerto Ricans and European Hispanics specifically, asthma prevalence is approximately 30% higher than among Whites
- Asthma hospitalization and ED visit rates are higher in Hispanics (all subgroups combined) than Whites, especially among children.
- Pacific Islanders and Filipinos are two subgroups with a high asthma burden; both have high asthma prevalence, asthma mortality rates, and Medi-Cal asthma hospitalization rates.
- People born in the U.S. are more likely to have asthma than people born outside of the U.S. The disparity is largest for Hispanics and Asians, who are 2 to 3 times more likely to have asthma if they were born in the U.S.

Gender:

- Among adults, the burden of asthma is greater for females
- Among children, the burden of asthma is greater for males.
- Lesbian and bisexual females have 70% higher asthma prevalence than straight females.

Blacks have:
4 times higher
asthma
ED visit and
hospitalization
rates
and
2 times higher
asthma
death rates
compared to
Whites

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People in low income areas are **4 times** more likely to **visit the ED** or be **hospitalized** for asthma

Almost **1 in 5** adults with asthma was **uninsured** in the past year

Income level:

- The rate of asthma hospitalizations and ED visits is four times higher for people living in areas with the lowest household incomes compared with the highest.
- Adults with higher household incomes (over \$50,000) are about 50-60% more likely to have well-controlled asthma than adults with lower incomes.
- Adults who report cost barriers to receiving medical care are less likely to have well-controlled asthma than those who do not report cost barriers.

Health factors:

- Almost 1 in 3 adults with current asthma is obese, compared to 1 in 5 adults who do not have asthma.

Are people with asthma getting the care they need?

- 411,000 adults and 38,000 children with current asthma were uninsured at some point in the past year.
- 239,000 adults and 75,000 children with current asthma do not have a usual place for health care.
- One quarter of adults and children used only a rescue medication in the past 3 months (i.e., they did not use any controller medication).
- 88.6% of Medi-Cal Managed Care beneficiaries with persistent asthma receive appropriate medications.
- Flu (influenza) infection can exacerbate asthma symptoms, yet more than one third of children and half of adults with current asthma did not get a flu vaccination in the past year.
- 1.2 million adults and 532,000 children with current asthma have never been given an asthma action plan by their health care provider.
- Only 30% of adults and 45% of children with current asthma have ever been advised by a health professional to change their home, work or school environment to reduce their asthma symptoms.

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