



BREATHING SPACE

Respiratory Disease Newsletter

*Health Promotion & Chronic Disease Division
Chronic Disease & Environmental Epidemiology Section*



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Welcome to BREATHING SPACE, a quarterly respiratory disease newsletter.

This newsletter is produced by the Minnesota Department of Health. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide health professionals, school nurses, and community members with current research, information, and resources on respiratory disease.

This newsletter is also distributed electronically. To receive an electronic version, contact:
jennifer.walker@health.state.mn.us
or go to the MDH asthma website at:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma.

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Minnesota Awarded Five Year Asthma Grant MDH implements statewide plan to address asthma

One in ten Minnesota adults report they've had asthma at some point in their lives. Emergency room visits and hospitalizations due to asthma cost the state more than \$33 million per year. And this public health problem is getting worse instead of better – asthma rates in the U.S. have increased rapidly over the past two decades, making it one of the most common chronic diseases in the country. Health officials know little about the exact causes of asthma, but they do know how to control the symptoms and inflammation of asthma. Asthma is not curable, but it is treatable.

Aided by a new grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (amounting to \$700,000 per year for five years) the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is implementing the "Strategic Plan for Addressing Asthma in Minnesota." This plan was developed by the Commissioner's Asthma Advisory work group, which met between October 2001 and May 2002. The workgroup was comprised of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, representatives from health plans, community based organizations, and non-profit associations. The plan will be implemented over the next five years with the intent of reducing hospitalizations and emergency room visits due to asthma and improving the lives of those who live with asthma.

The asthma plan calls for a comprehensive set of strategies to be carried out by a wide range of partners including caregivers, health care providers, schools, employers, and community groups. Strategies include gathering better data about the prevalence of asthma; creating greater public awareness of asthma; providing asthma education to health professionals; and developing public policies to reduce exposure to environmental triggers of asthma.

Since the grant began in October 2002, initial efforts have focused on ensuring that health care providers obtain the skills necessary to accurately diagnose and treat this complex disease. The American Lung Association of Minnesota (ALAMN) is working with the MDH in these efforts. In February, ALAMN offered its preparatory course for those wishing to become certified asthma educators. ALAMN is also coordinating the Physician Asthma Care Education (PACE) course for several three-person teams in early March.

For more information about the state asthma plan, please contact Janet Keysser at the Minnesota Department of Health at 612-676-6591 or janet.keysser@health.state.mn.us.



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For more information about asthma, and to download the strategic plan, check out our website at:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/

Asthma Data in Minnesota

The current understanding of the scope of asthma in Minnesota is improving, but incomplete. MDH has begun some initiatives to better understand and describe the burden of asthma in Minnesota. Tracking different aspects of asthma – prevalence of the disease, health care utilization, quality of life, and mortality – are important guides to planning education and intervention programs, and to developing policies that are necessary for preventing and controlling asthma in the future.

The most recent data we have about who has asthma in Minnesota comes from the 2000 Minnesota Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS). BRFSS is a telephone survey of adults, 18 years and older, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and conducted by each state. Respondents are asked about risk factors for chronic disease. This survey is completed yearly in Minnesota among approximately 3,500 non-institutionalized adults.

- An estimated 9.5% of Minnesotans age 18 and older say they have been told by a doctor at some point in their lives that they have asthma. Approximately 7% report that they currently suffer from the disease. This is consistent with national trends.
- More adults residing in Minneapolis/St. Paul (7.5%) than in Greater Minnesota (6.6%) report they currently have asthma.
- More women (9.2%) than men (4.9%) report they currently have asthma.

For more information, please contact Wendy Brunner at the Minnesota Department of Health at 612-676-5541 or wendy.brunner@health.state.mn.us.

Mesothelioma Investigation

MDH has been working on an investigation of mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer, among northeastern Minnesota iron miners. In 1997, the Minnesota Cancer Surveillance System (MCSS) reported that the rate of mesothelioma in men in the seven-county region of northeastern Minnesota is 70% higher than average. Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer whose only known cause is past exposure to asbestos. On average, it takes 20 to 40 or more years from the time of exposure for mesothelioma to develop to a stage at which it is diagnosed. Because of this long latency period, it is often very difficult to determine exactly when or where an individual may have been exposed.

The report documenting the study findings was presented on March 7, 2003, to the advisory group that assisted MDH with the study. The results will also be presented at an international symposium to be held in St. Paul, Minnesota on March 30-April 1, 2003 (see Upcoming Events). Details about the report will be highlighted in the June issue of this newsletter.

May is Asthma Awareness Month

Upcoming Events

2003 Occupational Medicine Update

March 21, 2003, 7:30 - 9:00 a.m.
Radisson Hotel Metrodome
For more information contact:
Tannie Eshenaur 651-215-0916

International Symposium on Health Hazard Evaluation of Fibrous Particles

March 30-April 1, 2003
St. Paul, MN
www.IERFINC.org

Minnesota Asthma Coalition Annual Meeting

June 12, 2003, Metropolitan Ballroom, Golden Valley, MN
www.mnasthma.org

Richard T. Cushing Memorial Lecture

June 12, 2003, Metropolitan Ballroom, Golden Valley, MN
Speaker: Michael Welch, M.D.
www.mnasthma.org

Meeting the Challenge of Healthy People 2010: Preventing and Controlling Asthma

June 19-21, 2003, Washington, D.C.
www.asthma2003.net

The University of Minnesota School of Public Health featured childhood asthma in the February 2003 issue of the Healthy Generations Newsletter. Go to www.epi.umn.edu/mch to see this 12-page collection of valuable information.

Set aside time in May to increase awareness of asthma, and raise awareness of indoor and outdoor asthma triggers. May is Asthma Awareness Month and May 6, 2003, is World Asthma Day. Go to www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma for information about World Asthma Day and Asthma Awareness Month, complete with planning kits, talking points, order forms for free asthma education materials, a list of activities, and more. To learn more about local activities, contact Dianne Kocourek Ploetz of the Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Program at 612-676-5460 or dianne.ploetz@health.state.mn.us.

Minnesota Asthma Coalition (MAC) Update

The Minnesota Asthma Coalition was established in 1999 by the American Lung Association of Minnesota in conjunction with the Minnesota Department of Health. The mission of the Minnesota Asthma Coalition is to enhance the quality of life for people with asthma in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Asthma Coalition (MAC) is comprised of a statewide steering committee and eight regional asthma coalitions as follows:

- **Central Minnesota Regional Asthma Coalition** (St. Cloud)
Kathy Benham at 320-255-9922 or kathy.behnham@alamn.org
- **Northeast Regional Asthma Coalition** (Duluth)
Pat McKone at 218-726-4721 or pat.mckone@alamn.org
- **Northwest Regional Asthma Coalition** (Bemidji)
Marti Lundi at 218-751-9224 or martil@charter.net
- **Southeast Regional Asthma Coalition** (Rochester)
Cherisa Templeton at 507-457-0844 or cherisa.templeton@alamn.org
- **Southwest Regional Asthma Coalition** (Marshall)
Kris Brands at 507-532-7216 or kris.brands@alamn.org
- **Twin City Metro Asthma Coalition** (St. Paul)
April Athmann at 651-268-7615 or april.athmann@alamn.org
- **West Central Regional Asthma Coalition** (Fergus Falls)
Connie Graff at 218-739-3709 or connie.graff@alamn.org

For more information on coalition activities and to learn how you can be part of the local coalition activities, call the regional MAC manager listed above. For general information about MAC, contact Lyann Yates at 651-227-8014, 1-800-642-LUNG or check out their website at www.mnasthma.org.

PACE Begins!

The Physician Asthma Care Education (PACE) program, developed by the University of Michigan School of Public Health, is a multi-faceted seminar designed to improve healthcare providers communication and therapeutic skills for asthma. Children seen by PACE trained physicians in other states had fewer hospitalizations and emergency department visits.

PACE was launched on March 1 and 2, 2003, when 20 providers from throughout Minnesota attended a train-the-trainer session in Chaska. Teams from these providers will then be offering PACE to others in the various MAC regions. More information will follow in the June newsletter.

Questions about lung health?

Call 1-800-548-8252
American Lung Association
Call Center

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For more information, or to request this material in another format contact: Deb Hill
Phone: 612-676-5213
MN Relay Service TDD: 1-800-627-3528
Breathing Space is also available on the MDH Asthma website:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma

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On the Tremolite Trail in Minneapolis

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), in cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, has completed an assessment to identify health concerns related to asbestos exposure between 1937 and 1989 from a vermiculite processing facility in North East Minneapolis. Former workers, family members of workers and some area residents have been identified as exposed groups.

Currently, MDH is concluding an investigation to identify individual asbestos exposures among community members. Last fall, the field staff completed interviews with neighbors living within a one-half mile radius of the plant, gathered information about household residents and offered property inspections. Telephone interviews of former residents of the area and others who may have been exposed should be completed in March. More than 5,000 participants have been interviewed to date. Letters with health recommendations will be sent to all participants this spring.

MDH is sponsoring a presentation on asbestos related diseases as part of the Occupational Health Update on March 21 to provide support for area health care providers who may see individuals from Northeast Minneapolis who were exposed to asbestos (see Upcoming Events). In the future, MDH hopes to conduct follow-up health investigations to determine any health outcomes that may have occurred as a result of vermiculite processing in Northeast Minneapolis. For more information, please contact Tannie Eshenaur at the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-215-0916 or tannie.eshenaur@health.state.mn.us.



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