

ASTHMA IN MINNESOTA



Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States, characterized by inflammation and narrowing of the airways. In 2002, asthma accounted for 484,000 hospitalizations and nearly 2 million visits to the emergency room nationally. Asthma is a cause of missed days from school and work, interrupted sleep and limited physical activity. While it cannot be cured, it can be controlled through adequate access to medical care, medications and self-management.

The Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Program has established an asthma surveillance system to better understand and describe the burden of asthma in Minnesota. Tracking different aspects of asthma – the number of people with the disease, visits to the hospital and the emergency room, 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.

Overall, Minnesota's asthma rates are lower than national rates; however, within certain subgroups of the population, there are areas of concern. Most significantly, there are large disparities in asthma hospitalizations between those who live in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and those who live in the rest of the state. Asthma hospitalization rates among children in Minneapolis are almost 50% higher than the national average. School survey data from greater Minnesota suggests that asthma is also having an impact in rural areas of the state in terms of symptoms and missed days from school and other activities. Asthma mortality rates appear to be decreasing; however, rates for those over 65 are higher than the national average.

While much has been learned about asthma in Minnesota, the picture remains incomplete. A major gap is the lack of data on rates of asthma by race and ethnicity. Other gaps include the lack of data on work-related asthma and asthma rates at the community or neighborhood level.

Adults with Asthma

- An estimated 10.5% of Minnesotans age 18 and older report having ever been told by a doctor they had asthma. Approximately 6.8% of Minnesotans currently suffer from the disease. That translates to an estimated 390,000 Minnesota adults who have a history of asthma and an estimated 255,000 who currently have asthma.
- The prevalence of asthma in Minnesota adults has been stable over the past 10 years.
- Women are more likely than men to report having asthma.
- Adults living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area are more likely to report having asthma than adults in greater Minnesota.

Children

- An estimated 7.9% of Minnesota children age 0-17 are reported to have asthma, which is equivalent to more than 98,000 Minnesota children.
- Asthma prevalence is higher among students in Minneapolis public schools than in St. Paul public schools.
- Two surveys of students in greater Minnesota show that many Minnesota children are wheezing but have not been diagnosed with asthma. Wheezing is a common symptom of asthma, and while not everyone who wheezes has asthma, a substantial portion of these students may have undiagnosed asthma.

Quality of Life

- Nearly 18% of Minnesota adults with asthma reported one or more days in the past year in which their activities were limited due to asthma.
- 19.5% of families with children who have asthma reported being greatly or moderately affected by their child's health condition.

Asthma Management

- 58% of Minnesota adults with asthma report having had at least one routine checkup for asthma in the past year.
- People with asthma are more likely than those without asthma to receive an annual flu shot.

Obesity and Asthma

- Adults with asthma are more likely than those without asthma to be obese.

Smoking and Asthma

- Adults with asthma are just as likely to smoke cigarettes as those without asthma. Smoking can be a trigger of asthma symptoms.

Health Care Utilization

- 15% of Minnesota adults with asthma visited an emergency room or urgent care center at least once in the past year because of their asthma.
- Asthma hospitalizations are highest among children under the age of 5. Boys under 5 have the highest rates.
- Between 1998 and 2003, statewide asthma hospitalization rates remained relatively stable.
- Asthma hospitalization rates in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area are higher than in any other region in the state. Within the Twin Cities, asthma hospitalization rates are highest in the city of Minneapolis.
- Asthma hospitalization rates peak in the fall, usually September, with the most distinct peaks seen in children.

Mortality

- Asthma mortality rates appear to be decreasing in Minnesota.
- In 2002, there were 91 deaths due to asthma among Minnesota residents; 66% occurred in persons aged 65 and older; of these, 58% were in women.

Information from, "Asthma in Minnesota: 2005 Epidemiology Report. Minnesota Department of Health. Minneapolis, MN. September 2005." Full report can be accessed on the web at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/documents/epi2005.pdf>