Many Minnesota Children With Asthma Go Undiagnosed

April 26, 2004: New data released by the Minnesota Department of Health show that many Minnesota children with asthma are going undiagnosed. Some who have been diagnosed are not receiving appropriate care. The data also reveal disturbing information about the impact of smoking on asthma.

In a survey of more than 13,000 high school students, researchers found that nine percent have asthma, while another 13 percent have symptoms suggestive of asthma, but have not been diagnosed. In a second survey, researchers found that 66 percent of middle school students with asthma do not have individualized care plans—called Asthma Action Plans—to manage their asthma.

“This new information should serve as a wake-up call for families and health care providers to make sure children with asthma symptoms are being accurately diagnosed and that those with asthma have an asthma action plan in place,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dianne Mandernach. She said this is especially important because health conditions such as asthma can disrupt a child’s education and development. “We know that asthma contributes to many absences at school and missed activities,” Mandernach said. “This kind of disruption can hamper a child’s ability to learn and grow along with the other students.”

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According to the middle school survey, 24 percent of students with asthma reported missing one or more days of school in the past year due to asthma symptoms; 36 percent reported missing recess, sports or other activities. Among high school students, 6.5 percent reported missing two or more days of school in the past month, while 8 percent reported missing two or more days of organized sports in the past month.

The surveys also found disturbing information about the impact of smoking on asthma:

* 46 percent of the middle school students and 37 percent of the high school students with asthma reported that they lived in a household where someone smokes.

* Among all of the high school students surveyed, those who are experiencing asthma-like symptoms, but have not been diagnosed, were the most likely to live in a household where someone smokes (43 percent).

Second-hand smoke is strongly linked to the development of asthma in young children. It is also a known trigger of asthma attacks in both adults and children. “The evidence clearly shows that smoking is contributing to the problem of asthma in Minnesota,” Mandernach said. “We cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is for adults never to smoke around children and for young people never to start smoking.”

For more information about these surveys, contact Wendy Brunner at 612-676-5541 or wendy.brunner@health.state.mn.us.
Upcoming Events

Central Minnesota Asthma Coalition
World Asthma Day Event

Over 150 people participated in the Central Minnesota World Asthma Day event at CentraCare Health Plaza in St. Cloud on May 4, 2004. The event highlighted eight interactive asthma educational displays including; Nebulizers, Anti-Smoking, Asthma Triggers, Asthma Care Plans, and booths provided by Respiratory Therapists from St. Cloud Hospital. St. Cloud River Bats Baseball mascot “Earl The River Bat” was on hand to sign baseball cards and have his picture taken with kids and adults. More than 12 coalition members and teenage volunteers from the St. Cloud Hospital Volunteer Program were on hand to help during the two hour event. Free food and prizes were available as well as a one mile walk around the scenic Plaza campus. Central Minnesota Asthma Coalition members have already begun the planning process for next year’s World Asthma Day event. For more information about the Central Minnesota Asthma Coalition, contact Kathleen Milligan at milliganala@yahoo.com or 320-253-6011.

Managing Asthma in Minnesota Schools

The MDH’s school asthma program, “Managing Asthma in Minnesota Schools: A Comprehensive Resource and Training Program”, will hit the road this fall. We are in the process of scheduling the day-long trainings throughout Greater Minnesota. To date, the following trainings have been scheduled:

- **August 18, 2004**
  Southwest Service Cooperative, Marshall
- **August 26, 2004**
  North Central Service Cooperative, Staples
- **September 2, 2004**
  District 196, Rosemount
- **September 23, 2004**
  Southeast Service Cooperative, Rochester
- **September 29, 2004**
  Lakes Country Service Cooperative, Fergus Falls
- **October 12, 2004**
  Northwest Service Cooperative, Thief River
- **October 13, 2004**
  Minnesota Department of Health, Northwestern District, Bemidji
- **October 29, 2004**
  Brainerd Learning Center, Brainerd

For more information about these trainings or if you would like to schedule a training in your area, contact Deb Hill at 612-676-5213, 1-877-925-4189, or deborah.hill@health.state.mn.us. More information can also be found on our website at [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/). Click on School Health or Minnesota Asthma Events.
Asthma Camps

Sign up today for one of the American Lung Association of Minnesota Asthma Camps. These camps help children learn about their asthma, the proper techniques for taking medications, and train children how to better manage their asthma all within a summer camp setting. For more information and to register, go to the American Lung Association of Minnesota website at www.alamn.org/asthma/AsthmaCamps.asp.

BREATHING SPACE, a quarterly respiratory disease newsletter, is produced by the Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Program. 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. For more information, go to the MDH asthma website at: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma.