Mesothelioma in Northeastern Minnesota

Ever since it began tracking cancer in 1988, the Minnesota Cancer Surveillance System has detected an elevated rate of mesothelioma among men in the northeast region of Minnesota. Mesothelioma is a rare cancer of the lining of the lung or abdomen and is caused primarily by exposure to asbestos 20 or more years prior to diagnosis. As of 2006, the rate of mesothelioma among men in northeastern Minnesota was approximately two times higher than the statewide average. The rate is not elevated among women.

It appears that much of the elevated rate can be attributed to two large and unique industries in northeastern Minnesota: iron ore mining and processing, and the manufacturing of asbestos-containing ceiling tile at the former Conwed Corporation plant in Cloquet. Workers in both industries experienced potential exposures to commercial sources of asbestos, although the role of other mineral dusts in the taconite industry remains under investigation. Among 5,200 former Conwed employees (1958-1974) believed to still be alive as of 1988, 25 developed mesothelioma between 1988 and 2006. Among 72,000 individuals who had ever worked in the iron mining industry before 1984, 58 developed mesothelioma over the same time period. It is not known how many additional cases may have occurred among workers who subsequently moved out-of-state.

In September 2007, MDH contracted with the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota to develop study protocols for assessing the health consequences of taconite mining.

Among the possible studies under consideration are:

1. a case-control study of mesothelioma comparing jobs and exposures of former iron miners who developed mesothelioma with jobs and exposures of those who didn’t develop mesothelioma,
2. a respiratory health study of taconite miners, and
3. a study of causes of death among former Minnesota iron miners.

These studies are expected to provide answers about the sources of exposure—whether from commercial asbestos products like insulation, or asbestiform fibers in the mineral dust—that are associated with mesothelioma or other health outcomes. The University is expecting to seek state funding to implement these studies.

For more information about mesothelioma and asbestos in northeastern MN, go to the MDH website at: http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/mcss/meso.html

For more information about the proposed studies of Minnesota iron miners, go to the School of Public Health website at: http://www.sph.umn.edu/lunghealth/home.html

What’s Inside?

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National Surveillance for Asthma, 1980-2004

The National Asthma Control Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published a summary of the latest national surveillance data on asthma in the October 19, 2007, issue of the CDC’s *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR). The report includes data on asthma prevalence, asthma attacks, physician office visits, emergency department visits, hospital outpatient visits, hospitalizations and asthma deaths.

Key findings:

- While asthma prevalence increased from 1980-1996, there was no significant change between 2001 and 2004. (Note: due to changes to the National Health Interview Survey asthma questions in 1997 and 2001, comparisons before and after cannot be made.)

- From 2001-2003, children were more likely to have asthma than adults, females more likely than males, blacks more likely than whites, Puerto Ricans more likely than those of Mexican descent, those below the federal poverty level more likely than those above, and people living in the Northeast region of the U.S. more likely than those in other regions. (See chart for percentages by poverty level.)

- Rates of asthma-related physician office visits, hospitalizations and emergency department visits increased from 1980 through the mid-1990s but this increase is accounted for by the increasing numbers of people with asthma over this period.

The report can be found online at the following link: [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5608a1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5608a1.htm)  
Or you can download the pdf version at: [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_ss.html](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_ss.html)  
*MMWR* Surveillance Summaries, October 19, 2007 / Vol. 56 / No. SS–8  
National Surveillance for Asthma, United States, 1980-2004

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is offering free Flu shot and asthma resources. Visit their website at: [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/)

Websites of Interest

U.S. EPA-Air and Radiation Division-Region V (which includes MN) has a new website focusing on asthma with links to EPA’s national page that includes fact sheets and publications in English and Spanish and other program resources. EPA Region 5 Asthma Contacts and National and State Asthma Programs and Contacts are also included: [www.epa.gov/region5/air/asthma](http://www.epa.gov/region5/air/asthma).

The Community Tool Box, the world's largest resource for free information on essential skills for building healthy communities, offers over 7,000 pages of practical guidance in creating change and improvement. Practical step-by-step guidance in specific coalition-building skills is available. The website has been recently improved and is now easier to navigate. Visit their website at [http://ctb.ku.edu/en/](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/)
City of Minneapolis & St. Paul
Ramsey County Health Dept receive
STAR Award!

Congratulations to the City of Minneapolis and the St. Paul/Ramsey County Health Department! Their poster “Influencing the Home Environment of Children with Asthma: The Healthy Homes Grant in Minnesota” received the STAR award for Science Translated to Action and Results (STAR) at the August 2007 CityMatCH conference in Denver, CO.

CityMatCH is a national organization of city and county health departments’ maternal and child health programs and leaders representing urban communities in the United States. The mission of CityMatCH is to improve the health and well-being of urban women, children and families by strengthening the public health organizations and leaders in their communities. The theme of the 2007 conference was Building the Best Environments for Families and Children.

The City of Minneapolis and St. Paul/Ramsey Health Department collaborated on Environmental Action for Children’s Health (EACH), a HUD Healthy Homes-funded home inspection and modification program for children with asthma in the greater Minneapolis and St. Paul Metropolitan area. EACH provides an essential service to low income children with asthma and their families. Environmental factors that may contribute to asthma exacerbations are identified and recommendations for modification of the home environment are provided for qualified children.

EACH provided services to 421 children. Conclusions from the EACH project included:

- Both an environmental assessment and asthma management assessment provide more comprehensive services.
- Focusing on the child’s bedroom ensures that one area of the home provides a “respite” area for the child.

- A home environmental program such as the EACH program has a positive influence on children’s home environments, resulting in: decreased hospitalizations for asthma; decreased school absences due to asthma; and less asthma symptom burden.

In 2004 the MDH Asthma Program received an EPA grant that provided funding for education and low cost product interventions in the homes of 64 children with poorly controlled asthma. The MDH project, Reducing Environmental Triggers of Asthma (RETA), and EACH both used Pediatric Home Service to educate the families and collect baseline health information. After the home intervention, follow-up data were collected by phone at 3, 9 and 12 months and during a home visit at 6 months. Program costs for RETA and EACH (range $468-$1,068 per home) were offset by savings from the reductions in health service utilization with the added benefits of improved school attendance and decreased symptom burden. More information on RETA is available at http://www.health.state.mn.us/asthma/homes.html

The Physician Asthma Care Education (PACE) program is a two-part interactive, multi-media educational seminar to improve physician awareness, ability, and use of communication and therapeutic techniques for reducing the effects of asthma on children and their families. They also provide instruction on how to document, code, and improve asthma counseling reimbursement. For more information go to: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/lung/asthma/pac e/index.htm
Minnesota’s Environmental Health Tracking & Biomonitoring Program Underway

On October 23, 2007, the MDH, in conjunction with the MN Pollution Control Agency and the MN Department of Agriculture, convened its Environmental Health Tracking and Biomonitoring (EHTB) scientific advisory panel for the first time. The EHTB program, which stems from 2007 state legislation, will enhance our understanding of the potential role that environmental factors play in affecting the occurrence of chronic and acute diseases in MN.

The program has two components: tracking & biomonitoring. Environmental health tracking is the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, and dissemination of data on human exposures to chemicals in the environment and on diseases potentially caused or aggravated by those chemicals. Data for environmental tracking are generally gathered from existing sources, such as statewide surveys and assessments. When tracked over time, environmental health data will help researchers, policy makers, and public health authorities recognize patterns, identify populations most affected, and determine actions to protect public health, such as supporting scientific research, developing intervention programs, implementing policies, and raising awareness about exposures to environmental health hazards.

EHTB program staff will be engaging stakeholders over the coming months to develop priorities for environmental health tracking, including identifying the types of indicators to be monitored. Two indicators that could potentially be tracked as part of EHTB include asthma hospitalizations and air quality.

Biomonitoring means directly measuring the amount of a chemical (or products that the chemical breaks down into) in people’s bodies. In order to measure the chemical, a sample of a person’s urine, hair, blood, or some other body tissue or fluid is tested. Biomonitoring measurements can be a good way to determine exposure to a chemical – especially for chemicals that linger in the body – because they indicate the amount of the chemical that actually gets into people, rather than the amount that could potentially get into them. Biomonitoring data have the potential to show changes in exposures to chemicals over time, to identify and assess groups of people who are at high risk for exposure, and to help decision makers target interventions to reduce exposure to chemicals in the environment. Biomonitoring projects measure only the exposure to chemicals and are not able to determine whether specific illnesses or health conditions are caused by exposure to those chemicals.

As part of the legislation that created the EHTB program, MDH was directed to implement four biomonitoring pilot projects. Two projects have been presented to the scientific advisory panel so far: one to measure arsenic in children in south Minneapolis who have been exposed to arsenic in the soil; and one to measure perfluorochemicals (PFCs) in adults in the east metro area who have been exposed to PFCs in the water. For more information, contact Michonne Bertrand, Program Coordinator, at 651-201-3661 or Michonne.Bertrand@health.state.mn.us

2007 SNOM Conference

The 2007 School Nurse Organization of Minnesota (SNOM) Conference took place Nov. 3, 2007, at the Sheraton West hotel in Minnetonka, MN. The conference agenda featured multiple presentations on asthma beginning with a 3-hour instructional summary of the successful Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts’ Healthy Learner Model. Cecelia DuPlessis Ericson, RN, MPH; Denise Herrmann, LSN, AE-C, NP; Mary Heiman, LSN, AE-C; and Pat Splett, MPH, PhD presented “School-Based Management of Chronic Conditions: The Healthy Learner Model” during the morning session. They highlighted how the Minneapolis school district used this process to address asthma in particular and how St. Paul school district has implemented the program over the last two years.

In the afternoon, Susan K. Ross, RN, AE-C, Senior Clinical Advisor to the MDH Asthma Program, presented on the revisions and updates to the 2007 NAEPP Asthma Guidelines. The revised guidelines shift the focus from treating patients based on a measurement of severity to a more complex yet accurate measurement of control, impairment, and future risk. The 2007 NIH/NAEPP guidelines are at: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/index.htm The power point from Susan’s presentation is on the MDH Asthma website at: http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/edtools.htm
Uncontrolled Asthma Common Among U.S. Adults

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) Nov 12 - Results of a population-based study provide more evidence that poorly controlled asthma is highly prevalent among adults in the US, irrespective of season. Among 558 subjects 18 to 64 years of age with asthma ranging in severity from intermittent to severe persistent, the majority (86.5%) experienced uncontrolled asthma at least once during a 12-month follow-up period, according to a report presented in Grapevine, Texas, at the annual meeting of the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology.

Among asthmatics classified as intermittent, 65% had uncontrolled asthma at least once during the study, whereas 83%, 87%, and 89% of patients with mild, moderate, or severe persistent asthma, respectively, experienced uncontrolled asthma at least once.

"Asthma symptoms can vary over time, so a patient's asthma control can be unpredictable," Dr. Richard Stanford, director of U.S. Health Outcomes at GlaxoSmithKline, who was involved in the study, noted in comments to Reuters Health.

"Proper and regular assessment of asthma control as recommended by the new asthma treatment and management guidelines issued in August by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) can lead to better treatment and improved outcomes for patients," Dr. Stanford added. The guidelines call for healthcare professionals to first assess the severity of a patient's asthma to determine initial treatment, if not already on therapy; and then obtain regular assessments of the patient's level of asthma control with validated tools, such as the Asthma Control Questionnaire (ACQ) and the Asthma Control Test (ACT), to determine if adjustments to therapy are needed.

FREE! Asthma Educational Resource

The Emergency and Community Health Outreach (ECHO) collaborative, Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis, and Steps to a Healthier St. Paul have available on DVD three health programs for individuals with limited English proficiency:

- Understand Asthma (Asthma & Respiratory Diseases)
- Get Fit, Eat Smart and Be Well! (Nutrition and Exercise)
- Put an End to Hidden Diabetes (Diabetes Prevention and Control)

The 20-minute programs aired on public television in 2006-07 and include a story as well as question and answer period with local health experts. They are available on the DVD in Hmong, Khmer, Lao, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. All programs are subtitled in English. Put an End to Hidden Diabetes also appears in English on each DVD. A discussion guide is available with each DVD to assist in using the programs as part of an educational or community gathering.

To order free copies of the DVDs for use in your community, school, health clinic or faith community, see: http://www.health.state.mn.us/diabetes/echodvd/.

The Minnesota Asthma Coalition Regional Coalitions are also available to assist you with a presentation. Information on the coordinator for your region can be found on pages 6 & 7 of this newsletter or by contacting Amy Roggenbuck at aaroggen@farmerstel.net
If you would like additional information on the Minnesota Asthma Coalition (MAC) in general or for a specific region, contact Amy Roggenbuck at aaroggen@farmerstel.net or 320-568-2471 or visit the MAC Website at www.mnasthma.org

Two Part-time Coordinator Positions Open!
MDH is looking for part-time coordinators for the Northwest Region (Bemidji area) and South Central Region (Mankato area). Please contact Erica Fishman at Erica.fishman@health.state.mn.us or 651-201-5899 if you would like additional information.

Metro Regional Asthma Coalition (Metro MAC)
The Metro MAC had a well attended meeting on September 24, 2007, in which the coalition received updates on recent activities and had presentations from partner organizations. The next meeting will take place on March 3, 2008, in early evening.

For more information on the next meeting or on coalition activities contact: Stephanie Kimmes at stephanie.kimmes@spps.org

Controlling Asthma Project
The Controlling Asthma Project, which is addressing pediatric asthma in Minneapolis and St. Paul, is seeking participants for its asthma strategic planning process. As the Project focuses on sustaining its six years of successful interventions to improve the health outcomes of children with asthma in Minneapolis and St. Paul, it is also considering how it can expand beyond these city limits by undertaking a three month planning process. The planning process is divided into five topic specific planning groups, including:

1. Environment, chaired by Rob Fulton, Director of the St. Paul Ramsey Dept of Public Health
2. Children with Asthma and their Families, chaired by Dory Baker, Children’s Hospital and Clinics & Stephanie Kimmes, Metro MAC
3. Schools, chaired by Denise Herrmann and Mary Heiman
4. Childcare and Early Childhood, chaired by Michele Reisgraf, Headstart
5. Health Care Provider and Health Policy, chaired by Peter Harper, Smiley’s Clinic

Each workgroup will meet for 90 minutes during the months of November, December, and January. The workgroups will be well organized and facilitated to ensure the planning is accomplished and your valuable time is well used.

Please consider volunteering for one or more of these planning groups. Contact Jill Heins at the American Lung Association of Minnesota at 651-223-9578 or e-mail Jill.Heins@alamm.org with your interest, and she will ensure you are connected with the appropriate staff person.

Southwest Regional Asthma Coalition (SWRAC)

Event Highlights:
Dr. Amy Ellingson has been to several area medical clinics to give presentations on the new Asthma Management Guidelines. Some of the places she has visited are: Willmar, Worthington, Slayton, Paynesville, Madison, and Glencoe. Thank you to Dr. Ellingson for all the time and effort she has put into this education!

The SWRAC sponsored a booth at the Latino Health Fair on September 30, 2007, in Willmar at a local church. Attendance was good and asthma information was available for participants. This was a great group to make contact with, as our Hispanic population is growing in the area.

The SWRAC has also been giving presentations to area Spanish ECFE (Early Childhood & Family Education) classes to give them the basics on asthma. Many great discussions occurred and participants were excited to take information with them to tell others in their community.
Upcoming Events:

We would like to wish coalition member Marilyn Bolin good luck on her new job position at the new Dental Clinic at Rice Memorial Hospital. We will miss her being a part of our Coalition, as she was a great advocate! We wish you and your family well, Marilyn!

“Implementation and Interpretation of Spirometry in the Primary Care Setting” Training

- **Date:** Thursday, February 7, 2008
- **Place:** Rice Memorial Hospital, Willmar
- **Audience:** Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Medical Doctors, and other health care Professionals
- **Faculty:** Ed Corazalla, MS, RPFT, Director of Pulmonary Lab, University of Minnesota.

This training is not to be missed! What a great opportunity to have an expert in our region to teach us more on this very important test for those with asthma.

“Caring for Kids with Asthma” Daycare Provider Training:

- **Date:** Thursday, March 6, 2008
- **Place:** Ridgewater College, Willmar

If you have any questions or would like more details regarding any future SWRAC Events, please contact Amy Roggenbuck, Coordinator at: aaroggen@farmerstel.net

Central Minnesota Regional Asthma Coalition (CMRAC)

Event Highlights:

On Saturday, September 22, 2007, more than 250 runners and walkers enjoyed a beautiful fall day and took part in the annual Fun Run/Walk for Asthma at Abbott Northwestern’s Sartell Outpatient Center to raise money for asthma awareness and education. This is the second year the event has been held.

The event, which included a 5-kilometer run and walk and a 1-kilometer run/walk for kids, raised $2,254 for the Central Minnesota Regional Asthma Coalition, which helps people with asthma in Central Minnesota control their asthma and live the life they want to live. Funds also help support the CMRAC Lecture for physicians and healthcare providers.

Northeast Regional Asthma Coalition (NERAC)

We welcome the new Northeast coordinator, Jan Salo Korby! She is a Registered Respiratory Care Practitioner employed by the American Lung Association of MN in both Tobacco Control and as the NERAC Coordinator. Jan also works in the Pulmonary Function and Rehabilitation Departments at St. Mary's Medical Center in Duluth. She has been busy reaching out to communities in NE Minnesota since she started.

Upcoming Events:

The next coalition meeting will be on Wednesday, January 23, 2008, at 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm at St. Mary's Medical Center, Regional Heart Center Conference Room (3rd floor), 407 E Third St, Duluth, MN. You can also attend the meeting by phone conference call.

On February 22, 2007, Jan will be speaking to Head Start staff sponsored by the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, on "Caring for Kids with Asthma" in Hermantown, MN.

For more information on the next meeting or on coalition activities contact Jan Salo Korby, at jan.salo.korby@alamn.org or 218-726-4721.

West Central Regional Asthma Coalition (WCRAC)

Event Highlights:

The next coalition meeting will be March 17, 2007, at 10 am at Lake Region Hospital in Fergus Falls and via teleconference.

For more information contact Doreen Hanson at doreen.hanson@mail.co.douglas.mn.us or 320-762-3043.
BREATHING SPACE

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 supported by Grant/Cooperative Agreement #U59/CCU522470 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

Questions about lung health?
Call 1-800-548-8252
American Lung Association Call Center

MDH Asthma Staff Contact Information:
Asthma Program Telephone Number: 651-201-5909
Toll Free Number: 1-877-925-4189
Asthma Web Site: http://www.health.state.mn.us/asthma/

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