



# What Docs Should Know About...

## How Indoor Environment Affects Childhood Asthma

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**Asthma is the leading chronic childhood disease in America, and has significant effects on overall child health and development.**

- In the United States, nearly 5 million children under age 18 suffer from asthma.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 1980, the number of deaths from asthma has increased nearly 80% in children under age 19.<sup>2</sup>
- Asthma disproportionately affects minority groups in the US: Asthma is 26% more prevalent in African American children than white children, and African American children 0-4 years old are six times more likely to die from an asthma attack than white children of the same age.<sup>3</sup>
- Nationally, children ages 5 to 17 lose a total of over 14 million school days each year from asthma.<sup>4</sup>

### **How are asthma and a child's environment related?**

- The indoor environment (home, child care setting, etc.) has a significant impact on children's health because they spend 90% of their time indoors.
  - Poor housing conditions can exacerbate asthma because older, substandard housing usually poses the most severe indoor health hazards through increased exposure to environmental factors that cause and worsen asthma such as dust allergens, molds, cockroaches, rats, mice, cold air, and dry heat.<sup>5</sup>
  - Data shows that families who move from high-poverty to lower poverty housing report lower asthma rates.<sup>6</sup>
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### **Docs can help asthmatic children by advocating for better housing policies.**

- Educate families about asthma and the environmental factors that worsen the condition.
- Assist families in finding safe and healthy housing by linking them with appropriate agencies and programs (see below in "Additional Resources").
- Advocate for fair housing policies locally and nationally. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website explains fair housing and equal opportunity. Learn about policies that promote fair housing at: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/index.cfm>.<sup>6</sup>

### **Additional Resources**

- Contact your local Housing Authority for information on low and moderate income housing.
- HUD has local offices that provide support for a range of housing related issues. Please visit their website at <http://www.hud.gov>.
- The National Asthma Education and Prevention Program provides teacher training videos and manuals at minimal cost. For more information, call (301) 592-8573 or visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/naepp/>.

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<sup>1</sup> Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Asthma Facts and Figures. Retrieved on 23 June 2006 from <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=8&sub=42>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. April 24, 1998. SS-1, 1-28.

<sup>3</sup> The Sustainable Washington Alliance. *The Sustainable Washington Environmental Health Action Guide*. <http://www.swampnet.org/swehag/m.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Asthma Facts and Figures. Retrieved on 23 June 2006 from <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=8&sub=42>.

<sup>5</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition. *2006 Advocates' Guide to Housing and Community Development Policy*. Housing and Health. Retrieved on 23 June 2006 from <http://www.nlihc.org/advocates/housingandhealth.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Goering, J., Feins, J.D. (Ed.). (2003). *Choosing a Better Life? Evaluating the Moving to Opportunity Social Experiment*. Urban Institute Press.

<sup>6</sup> The US Department of Housing and Urban Development. [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).