

Chronic Disease Prevention Bulletin

September 2006 Distributed by: Southeast Health District, 1115 Church Street, Waycross, GA



The Dangers of Asthma

.... Especially among the youth...

How dangerous is asthma? My best friend can answer this question. My best friend's goddaughter had a constant cough during the spring of 2006; she went to the doctor and was initially diagnosed with bronchitis. About a month later, she was diagnosed with asthma. Two months after being diagnosed with asthma, she had an asthma attack and died.

The American Lung Association recently reported that thousands of Georgia youngsters with asthma are learning a hard lesson as they return to school. Many of their parents and teachers aren't aware of the risks of the disease and often aren't prepared to help them.



More than 2,000 parents participated in a national survey, and 27 percent said they were not familiar with asthma. Asthma often shows up for the first time when children start

school and are exposed for the first time to molds and other substances. *"That's why six times more asthmatic children are admitted to hospitals and emergency clinics during late August and early September than during summer months,"* said Dr. Norman H. Edelman, the American Lung Association's chief medical officer.

Asthma can be life threatening, and is the leading cause of absenteeism.



Among Georgia children age 17 and under, 9.6 percent have asthma, one of the highest rates in the country. African-Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma. In 2004, the national prevalence rate in blacks of both sexes and all ages was 24 percent higher than that for whites, said

Mike Tringale of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

Some of the asthma triggers include: ground-level ozone or smog - a particular problem in traffic-clogged Atlanta, second-hand smoke, cleaning chemicals, pesticides, cockroaches, mold, pollen, vermin dander, dust mites, industrial carpeting - which gives off gases, etc. Edelman said parents' lack of knowledge about asthma could cause afflicted children to fall behind in school and athletics.

Other astonishing numbers include:

- ❑ In Georgia, 480,000 adults and 212,000 children age 17 and under have asthma.
- ❑ Asthma costs Georgia \$296 million annually in direct health care expenses, including medications and emergency room visits.
- ❑ There were more than 47,000 emergency room visits in 2003 with asthma as the primary diagnosis.
- ❑ Children age 1-4 with asthma have the highest emergency room visit rates, 1,469 per 100,000 population.
- ❑ Atlanta is ranked 4th among the 10 worst cities for asthma.

Knocking Out Asthma: What can parents do?



Every child with asthma should have a written Asthma Action Plan, developed with the child's physician, that details that child's specific asthma triggers, medications, instructions regarding physical activity, like using an inhaler before strenuous exercise for some children, and an emergency

plan. Caregivers can take a few easy steps that will insure an asthmatic child has a healthy and productive school year.

Get the [American Lung Association's Back to School with Asthma Toolkit](http://www.lungusa.org) today at www.lungusa.org. It will give you all the information you need to keep your child safe and healthy and make going back to school a pleasure instead of a worry.

They can also work on getting schools to adopt tobacco free school policies. Other elements to preparing your child with asthma for school include being up-to-date on regular doctor's visits, having prescriptions updated and filled for the first day of school, and scheduling a flu shot now for your child to be immunized in October. Preventing influenza may reduce asthma episodes and trips to the emergency room; flu shots for people with asthma have been proven safe by American Lung Association clinical research.

Source: American Lung Association and Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health.