

HIGHLIGHTS

FROM THE

COMMUNITY

HEALTH

DATABASE

2000

Southeastern Pennsylvania

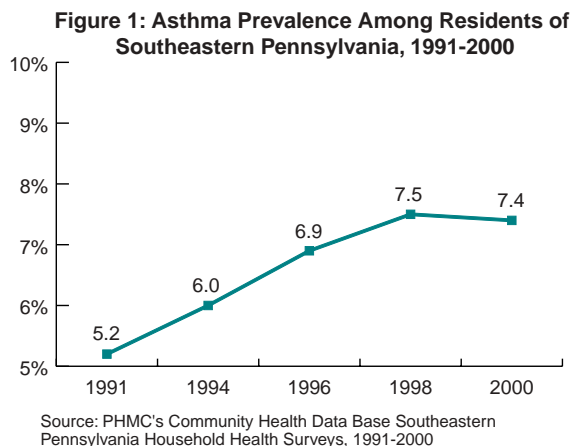
Household Health Survey

PHMC's 2000 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey data are available! For more information on how to access this new survey data, please contact **Siobhan Hawthorne** at (215) 985-2527 or siobhan@phmc.org.

PROFILE OF SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA RESIDENTS WITH ASTHMA

Asthma is a chronic health disease affecting the airways that carry air into and out of the lungs. Symptoms of asthma vary from person to person, but may include coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Asthma is triggered by a number of different particles such as cold air, tobacco smoke, pollen, mold, and cockroaches. More than 17.7 million Americans currently have asthma, one-third of whom (5.6 million) are children under the age of 18.¹ In fact, asthma is the leading serious illness among children.² Over the past twenty years, the percentage of the U.S. population with asthma and the number of deaths due to asthma have dramatically increased. Direct medical costs related to asthma have also increased; currently, over \$8 billion dollars are spent per year on treating asthmatics. Using data from PHMC's 2000 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey, this issue of *AccessNotes* examines demographic and socio-economic characteristics, health status and utilization of health services among adults and children with asthma in Southeastern Pennsylvania.³

Currently, nearly one out of thirteen persons in Southeastern Pennsylvania (7.4%, or 274,300 persons) report having asthma; this represents 185,000 adults (6.6%) and 89,000 children (10.0%). The percentage of all persons with asthma in Southeastern Pennsylvania has increased over 40% in the past decade. In 1991, 5.2% of persons had asthma compared to 7.4% in 2000 (Figure 1).



The prevalence and distribution of asthma cases shows some variability across the five counties of Southeastern Pennsylvania with the greatest difference observed between Philadelphia and the four suburban counties. The highest prevalence of asthma is found in Philadelphia, where approximately one out of ten residents report having asthma, compared to Chester (6.2%), Delaware (6.1%), Montgomery (6.1%) and Bucks (5.8%) counties.

In addition to geographic variability among asthmatics, distinct differences in the prevalence of asthma occur among population subgroups.

- Asthma prevalence decreases with age. Children (ages 0 -17) are the most likely to have asthma (10.0%), while older adults (ages 65+) are least likely to have asthma (4.6%).
- There is a lower prevalence of asthma among adult men than women (5.1% of men vs. 8.0% of women) but a higher prevalence among male children (11.8% of boys vs. 8.1% of girls.)
- The prevalence of asthma among adults is much lower among whites (5.6%) and Asians (4.1%) compared to blacks (10.3%) or other racial groups (14.7%). This pattern holds true for children as well; white (7.5%) and Asian children (2.7%) are less likely to have asthma compared to black children or children of other racial groups (15.9% and 17.2%, respectively.)
- The adult Latino population is nearly twice as likely to have asthma than the non-Latino adult population (12.4% versus 6.4%); similarly, Latino children are almost twice as likely to have asthma compared to non-Latino children (15.8% vs. 9.5%).
- Asthma is significantly more prevalent among the poor than the non-poor. Nearly one out of eight (12%) residents living below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level has asthma compared to 6.3% of the non-poor population.

Asthmatics and non-asthmatics also differ greatly with respect to self-reported health status and selected health behaviors.

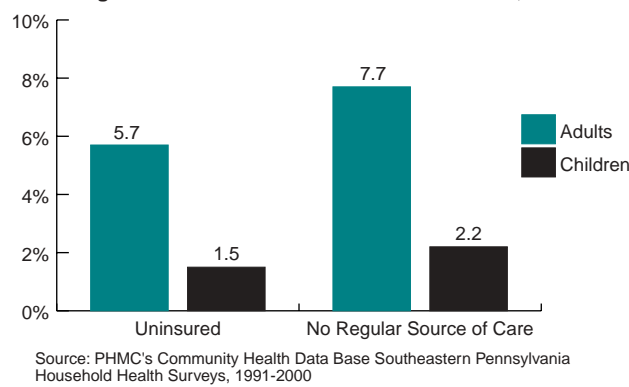
- Southeastern Pennsylvania residents with asthma are more likely to be in fair or poor health compared to non-asthmatics. Greater than one out of five children (22.9%) with asthma are reported to be in fair/poor health compared to 3.8% of non-asthmatic children. Nearly two out of five adults (36.9%) with asthma say they are in fair/poor health compared to 15.8% of adults without asthma.

- Among persons with asthma, many are taking prescription medications to help them control the disease. More than three out of four (76.5%) adult asthmatics and almost nine out of ten children with asthma are currently taking a prescription drug to control their asthma.

- One in five (21.9%) adults with asthma currently smoke cigarettes. Two out of five asthmatic adults (37.9%) and more than four in ten asthmatic children reside in a household where there is a smoker.

Residents with asthma may face barriers to receiving needed health care including having no private or public health insurance coverage or lacking a regular source of care.

Figure 2: Health Insurance and Regular Source of Care Among Southeastern PA Residents with Asthma, 2000



Both of these facts are particularly important for asthmatics since having access to care and a regular physician can help to reduce the use of the emergency department for routine, non-urgent care (Figure 2).

- A sizeable number (4.3% or 11,900) of persons with asthma in Southeastern Pennsylvania have no health insurance coverage at all. Almost 6% of adults with asthma (10,500 adults) and nearly 2% of children with asthma (1,400 children) have no private or public health insurance.

- Nearly 6% of residents with asthma (16,100) have no regular source of care. More than 1,400 adults and children with asthma use the hospital emergency department as their regular source of care.

- Six percent of adults with asthma and 4.0% of children with asthma have not visited a physician or other health professional in the past year.

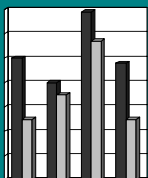
- Residents with asthma are nearly two times more likely to have had at least one visit to an emergency department compared to non-asthmatics (41.2% vs. 22.3%). Approximately two out of five adults with asthma (39.9%) and children with asthma (43.7%) have had at least one emergency department visit in the past year.

As these findings demonstrate, asthma is a serious chronic condition that affects a significant number of Southeastern Pennsylvania residents. It is also a health condition that has a higher prevalence among particular racial and ethnic groups. Asthmatics are more likely to be in fair or poor health and face barriers to obtaining health care. As a result, some asthmatics seek health care only when they are experiencing a respiratory emergency rather than utilizing preventive care. This is not only more costly for the health care system, but can also result in poorer patient care and quality of life.

For additional information on asthma in Southeastern Pennsylvania, please contact **Francine Axler** at (215) 985-2521 or francine@phmc.org or **Amanda Reyes** at (215) 731-2018 or amanda@phmc.org.

PHMC's Health Data Resource Center

Want to Know More About Your Community?



Access to the demographic, socio-economic and health data you need for writing proposals and planning programs and services to match the needs of your community has never been easier to find! The new **Health Data Resource Center** has been created exclusively to meet the information needs of small and medium-sized non-profit organizations in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Available data include: PHMC's Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Surveys, Vital Statistics and U.S. Census. Contact the HDRC today for more details on smoking and other concerns affecting the health, safety and well-being of residents in your community.

Contact the Health Data Resource Center today!

(215) 985-6238

hdrc@phmc.org

www.phmc.org/hdrc

The HDRC is an information service of PHMC funded by the William Penn Foundation. The service is available through an Affiliation Agreement and only to small and medium-sized, community-based non-profit organizations. Internet access to the Health Data Resource Center's online resources are password protected and are available only to Affiliates.

¹ *The Asthma Research Centers Progress Report, 2000*. (January 2001). New York: American Lung Association. Retrieved January 16, 2001, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.lungusa.org/arc/index.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Philadelphia Health Management Corporation's Community Health Data Base, 2000 Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey.