

Asthma is a respiratory disease that often starts during childhood. People with asthma suffer from repeated attacks of wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and coughing. The exact cause of asthma is unknown. However, environmental triggers play a role and can make asthma symptoms worse. It is treatable but not curable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of 2020, 25.2 million (7.8%) Americans had asthma.

HOW OUR ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS ASTHMA

Asthma symptoms often occur when a person is exposed to an asthma trigger. Triggers are any condition or thing that causes inflammation in the airways. Many triggers exist in the outdoor environment, including pollen, cigarette smoke and air pollution. Two key air pollutants that cause asthma symptoms are ozone, which is found in smog, and particulate matter, which is found in haze, smoke, and dust.

HOW TO REDUCE ASTHMA SYMPTOMS

- Consult a health care provider.
- Take asthma medication regularly, as prescribed.
- Do not smoke or work to quit smoking.
- Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Check local air quality on the [AirNow¹](#) website.
- Limit outdoor activities when air quality is poor.
- Change physical activity levels (i.e., you can engage in regular low-intensity physical activity such as walking, or hiking).
- Keep quick-relief medicine (i.e., rescue inhaler) nearby when active outdoors.
- Minimize dust, mold, and pet dander in the home.



MONITORING ASTHMA IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania tracks asthma-related hospital visits and data is available on the [Enterprise Data Dissemination Informatics Exchange](#) (EDDIE) by county, and by sex, race/ethnicity, and age group.² The data comes from the state inpatient hospitalization datasets maintained by the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4). The state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) also tracks more than 10 indicators of asthma on the EDDIE, including current asthma and ever been told they have asthma. With these data, people who are more at risk for asthma can be identified and more effective interventions can be developed. As of 2017, the BRFSS estimates that 10% of adults and 9% of children in Pennsylvania reported having current asthma. That is more than 1 million people.

ASTHMA PROGRAMS IN PENNSYLVANIA

The Pennsylvania [Asthma Control Program](#) aims to increase asthma awareness and educate asthma sufferers about how to better manage their health.³ The program also produces regular asthma surveillance reports.

The Pennsylvania [School Health Program](#) provides resources related to childhood asthma.⁴ County-level student asthma data are available for the 2013 to 2015 school years based on school district records.

If you have questions or concerns about asthma, please contact the
Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology at dehe@pa.gov or 717-787-3350.

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¹ <http://www.airnow.gov/>

² <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/HealthStatistics/EDDIE/Pages/EDDIE.aspx>

³ <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/Asthma/>

⁴ <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/school/>