Why Are Black and Latino Children at Greater Risk for Asthma?

Regardless of neighborhood income, Black and Latino children are more likely to develop wheezing.

June 28, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

The likelihood of developing asthma was higher for children raised in more densely populated or poorer neighborhoods, while Black and Latino children had a higher incidence of asthma regardless of neighborhood income.

The multi-institutional study spanning 40 years was published in JAMA Pediatrics and analyzed data from nearly 6,000 children in birth cohorts located throughout the United States that are part of the Children's Respiratory and Environmental Workgroup consortium.

Via questionnaires and interviews, researchers gathered information about wheezing and asthma occurrence, medical history and demographics from children and their parents. In combination with neighborhood conditions, researchers then analyzed how children's race or ethnicity and their mother's education level and smoking habits related to children's likelihood of developing asthma and wheezing.

Within their first year of life, 46% of children experienced wheezing; 26% continued to wheeze through age 11. One out of four children were diagnosed with asthma by age 11 years old. Persistent wheezing and asthma were more commonly found in children living in neighborhoods with a higher population density as well as children in low-income families or families with an income below the poverty line.

Even in neighborhoods with more resources, Black and Latino children had a higher risk for asthma compared with white children.

Our results emphasize that solving health inequities requires not just individual-level changes in practice but also large-scale changes in policy and practice to improve the respiratory health of populations at the neighborhood, regional and national level," senior author Diane Gold, MD, of the Channing Division of Network Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said in a news release. "Housing conditions, environmental exposures and access to care are all likely contributors to our findings. But in addition to these, racism, both at the individual and institutional level, may also contribute to environmental injustice and health inequities.

To learn more, read “Children With Acute Asthma Experience Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Care” and “Black and Latino Moms’ Mental Distress May Increase Babies’ Asthma Risk.”

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