



**CHIRAH**

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# CHIRAH Newsletter

## Welcome to the first issue of the CHIRAH Newsletter!

CHIRAH is the **Chicago Initiative to Raise Asthma Health Equity**, but you may know us as the Chicago Asthma Study. You are receiving this newsletter because you were involved in this study and we promised to keep you up-to-date on our findings. In this issue, **we want to thank you for your excellent participation and** we'll be telling you **more about the project, what's happening with it now**, and a few of the **earliest results**. Future issues will have more results from the study, and tips on taking care of asthma.

**Asthma Tip:**  
Asthma must be managed all the time,  
not just when you have symptoms!



### What is CHIRAH?

**The Chicago Initiative to Raise Asthma Health Equity** or **CHIRAH**.

is a study to better understand why some communities in the Chicago area suffer more from asthma than others (disparities) and find a way to improve the health of asthma patients.

In 2002, the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute funded a National Center of Excellence to Reduce Asthma Disparities in Chicago consisting of a team of physicians and social scientists at the **John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County** and the **Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University**.

The CHIRAH study has four parts:

1) the student survey, 2) recruitment for the main study, 3) telephone follow-up, and 4) a pilot study of a way to improve health of asthma patients.

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## Student Survey

With the cooperation of the Chicago Public Schools and the Archdiocese of Chicago, we distributed over 62,000 questionnaires in 105 schools (78 CPS, 27 Catholic) between May, 2003 and May, 2005. CHIRAH bought pizzas and cookies to thank the students for their help!

Surveys were returned by 48,917 students in the school survey. We received surveys from students from pre-kindergarten through high school, and ranging in age from 3 to 18 years old. The survey forms were completed in Spanish 17% of the time. Eighty-three percent of the surveys were completed by CPS students and 17% were completed by students in schools of the Archdiocese of Chicago. (See Table 1a)



Average Age	8.8 years
Female	50%
Hispanic	41%
Black (non-Hispanic)	29%
Spanish language	17%
Archdiocese of Chicago	17%

**Table 1a.**  
**Characteristics of the Students surveyed**

The students surveyed reported a lot of asthma in their homes. We found that 14% of the students were diagnosed with asthma. An additional 12% of the students report symptoms that may be asthma. Almost one third of the homes have someone (the child or someone else) with asthma. (See Table 1b)

Child diagnosed with asthma	14%
Child with possible asthma	12%
Other household members with asthma	23%
Any household member with asthma	30%

**Table 1b.**  
**Asthma reported by students**

## Main Study Recruitment

In addition to the reports from students the study asked adults with asthma and caregivers of children with asthma to participate in medical tests to understand their asthma. This was the main part of the study. We called 3,676 eligible households and 353 adults and 561 child-caregiver pairs agreed to be in the study. Each of the adult and caregiver participants completed a long interview with our field staff. The children completed a much shorter questionnaire. Most participants contributed blood samples; and almost everyone completed a test of lung function. Saliva samples were taken to assess the impact of cigarettes smoke on asthma symptoms.

**Table 2a. Characteristics of Main Study Participants at first Interview**

	Adults	Children
Number	353	561
Average Age	30.9 yrs.	10.6 yrs.
Female	78%	41%
Hispanic	28%	25%
Black (non-Hispanic)	56%	57%
Education beyond high school*	50%	60% *
Household income less than \$30,000	46%	51%

\*Caregivers

### Are you moving?

To continue receiving this newsletter, and to be eligible for future extensions of the study, please let us know if you move or change your phone number. Mail your contact information to:

Institute for  
Healthcare Studies

676 N. St. Clair  
Street, Suite 200  
Chicago, IL 60611

ATTN: CHIRAH

Or call our hotline at  
**312-695-4976**

## Main Study Recruitment cont.

To be part of the CHIRAH study, participants must have asthma. We only included people who were diagnosed by a physician and took asthma medicines at least eight weeks in the last year. We found that study participants had real problems because of their asthma. On average, adults had asthma symptoms (wheezing, chest tightness, cough, or shortness of breath) on five days in the last two weeks, and had trouble sleeping because of asthma on three nights. Similarly, the children had slightly over three days with asthma symptoms and awoke two nights because of asthma in the last two weeks. (See Table 2b)

In the last 2 weeks...	Adults	Children
Days with asthma symptoms	5.1	3.3
Nights awaked due to asthma	3.2	2.1

**Table 2b. Asthma found in Main Study Participants at First Interview**



**Asthma Tip:**  
Work with your doctor to get a written health care plan for your asthma.

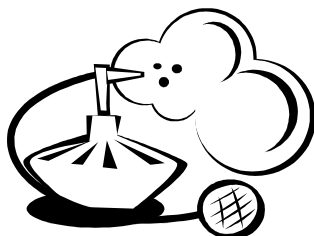
## Telephone Follow-up

The next stage of the study was the longest. We called all participants every three months for a year and a half to see how they were doing. Each of these interviews lasted anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, with some people talking much longer! (See Table 3a The interviews were numbered T1 through T7)

	Adults	Care-givers	Total
T1	353	561	914
T2	329	508	839
T3	318	506	824
T4	314	505	819
T5	300	500	800
T6	306	486	792
T7	325	517	842
Total	1,893	3,023	4,916

**Table 3a. Numbers of Interviews**

We have just finished the very last follow-up interview. Almost 5,000 interviews or 90% were completed. Such a high percentage is very rare in survey research and shows how very interested you and all the study participants have been in this subject. **Congratulations on your excellent participation!**



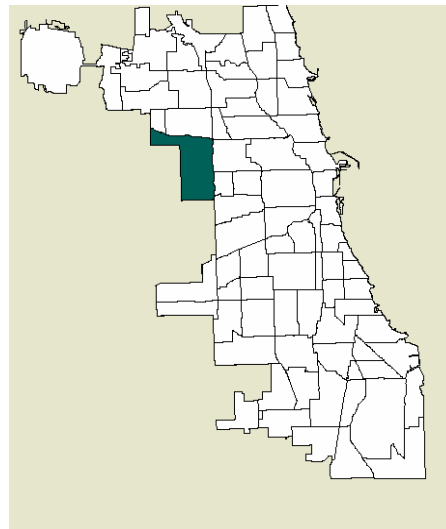
**Asthma Tip:**  
Did you know that perfumes can be a trigger for asthma?

## Pilot Study to Improve the Health of Asthma Patients

We are now using some of the things we have learned from the CHIRAH study to create and try out a special program for giving people information about their asthma and ways to control it. This program is being conducted in the Austin neighborhood and will be completed in April. We will use what we learn to expand or improve the care of asthma patients.

### **What Next???**

We will be looking very closely at all the information you have given us and we'll be reporting what we find in future newsletters. We will also publish it so other health professionals can use the information from this study. Perhaps you will see it mentioned on TV or in the newspaper.



## Your Interviewers

Gathering research data over the phone requires special skills and an interest in talking to people. Did you ever wonder who the folks were on the other end of the phone? They spent countless hours asking questions, making sure it was a convenient time for you and that your responses accurately reflected your or your child's experiences. Let's have a closer look at your interviewers.

### **Bob Sprengel**

Developing asthma as an adult, Bob knows firsthand how debilitating this condition can be. His rescue inhaler and spacer are always handy. Bob has participated in the American Lung Association "Asthma Walk" for the last five years helping to raise awareness and funds for asthma research. Bob's telephone experience spans eighteen years of interviewing and supervision. For fun Bob enjoys reading, movies and visiting Midwestern wineries. More recently (inspired by the New York City blackout) he's become a flashlight enthusiast accumulating a useful collection of pocket lights, hand-held lights, headlamps and lanterns. He calls his experience with CHIRAH illuminating.

### **Mary Marre**

Mary Marre really enjoyed talking with the participants and getting to know them better over the course of the study. Possessing many years of recruiting and customer service experience, Mary previously worked with the CHIRAH Team on another large scale Asthma tracking study at Rush Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center with Bob, Pearl, Chris Lyttle and Dr. Kevin Weiss. When she's not skip-tracing wayward CHIRAH respondents, she enjoys keeping up with the Chicago Art Scene and her many artist friends in Wicker Park!



### **Carla Cowens**

Before joining the CHIRAH project Carla worked on CHIRP, another Northwestern University study where she recruited and interviewed parents and children in schools, clinics and hospitals. As a childhood asthma sufferer, Carla's understanding of the disease was revealed in her interviewing style. You knew that she could relate to your condition. She was able to put you at ease and help you through those long interviews. Carla's favorite pastimes are reading and bowling. I'd have to add that she also enjoys a good laugh.

### **Pearl Burks**

Pearl is an old hand at interviewing with fourteen years of experience in customer satisfaction surveying, telemarketing and most recently, CHIRAH. She was a peer mentor, monitor and coach at a previous call center. Pearl enjoyed interviewing and following up with the caregivers and adults in the study and took an interest in how their medication improved their condition. In her spare time Pearl likes sewing, hat making and bowling.

**Thanks! We want to thank everyone** who has participated in the CHIRAH study. As mentioned earlier, this group of study participants has shown an exceptional commitment to the study. Your information will help solve some of the problems of asthma in Chicago.

**Any suggestions?** Please write us or phone us with any comments or suggestions for the newsletter.