

**CHIRAH**  
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# CHIRAH Newsletter

## Happy Summer from CHIRAH!

CHIRAH is the "Chicago Initiative to Raise Asthma Health Equity." You are receiving this newsletter because you helped with this study and we promised to keep you up-to-date on our findings. It is one of our ways of thanking you for your time, effort and information. In this issue we summarize some of the results that are coming out of the study and give a few tips on taking care of asthma. **THANKS!**

**Asthma Tip:**  
*Learn your triggers.  
 Not everyone reacts to the same things.*

### How serious is your asthma?

Health professionals\* believe it is important to measure asthma severity and control. We used their guidelines and found from the first CHIRAH interview that the 561 children and 353 adults had different levels of severity and different levels of control. It is interesting that sometimes a person with **severe** asthma but with **good control** may feel better than a person with **mild** asthma but **poor control**. We found that about half of adults and children with asthma had very poor control of their asthma.

\*The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health



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	Adults	Children
<b>Severity</b>		
Intermittent (Occasional)	0%	2%
Mild	16%	39%
Moderate	59%	42%
Severe	25%	17%
<b>Control</b>		
Well controlled	6%	11%
Not well controlled	39%	44%
Very poorly controlled	55%	45%

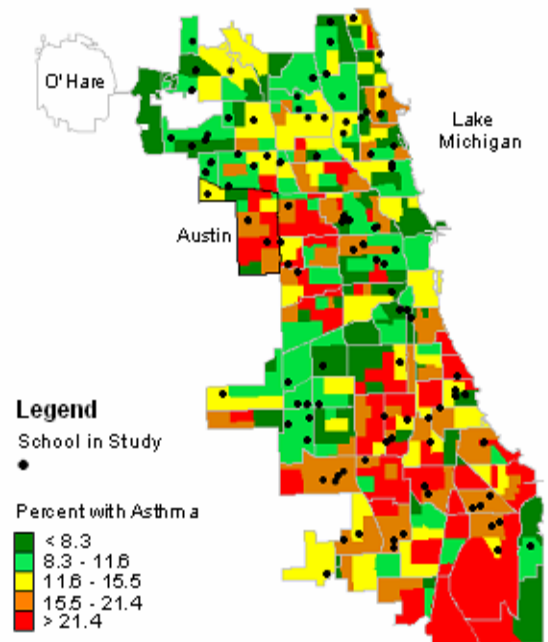
## Chicago Neighborhoods

It turns out that in some neighborhoods there are more kids with asthma than in others—even when the neighborhoods are right next to each other! In some neighborhoods, only 2 kids out of 100 had asthma. In other neighborhoods, 40 kids out of 100 had asthma. That's a big difference!

This doesn't mean you should move if you live in a neighborhood with more asthma. If you know a lot of kids have asthma in your area, talk to your doctor and make a plan. There are lots of things you can do to keep your child healthy.

What next?

You might be wondering why some neighborhoods have more asthma. So are we. Our next step will be to look at these neighborhoods and figure out why they're different. We will let you know what we find.



### 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  
ATTN: CHIRAH  
750 N. Lake Shore  
Dr.  
10th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60611

Or call our hotline at  
**312-942-3231.**

## How about schools?

As we reported in the last newsletter, we surveyed 48,917 students in 105 public and parochial schools in Chicago. We found that 26% of students surveyed had been diagnosed with asthma or had symptoms that could be related to asthma. Looking at the schools, we found that some had as few as 17% of their students with symptoms of asthma, while others had up to 47%. Having symptoms of asthma does not mean having a diagnosis of asthma. We found the percent of students with...

- Diagnosed asthma ranged from 7% to 26%
- Undiagnosed symptoms ranged from 9% to 30%.

Schools with higher rates of asthma often also had more African American students, more students from low income households, and more boy students.

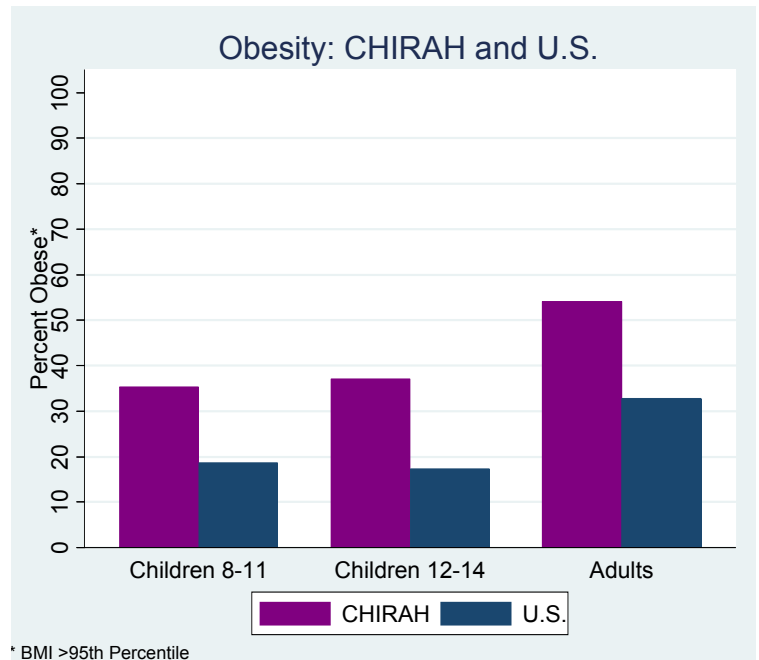
Our next step is to see if schools with higher rates of asthma tend to be located closer together. If they are, perhaps environmental factors around the schools play a role in asthma diagnoses and/or symptoms.



## Asthma and Weight: Is there a connection?

Researchers often compare conditions in suburbs and the inner city. For at least 20 years, they have found that people living in the inner city have higher rates of obesity and higher rates of asthma than those living in the suburbs. It has also been reported that the severity of asthma is worse in people living in the inner city.

We are now using information from the CHIRAH study to try to understand the relationship between obesity and the effects of asthma, such as asthma symptoms, emergency room visits and worse quality of life, in both adult and children.



### **CHIRAH on TV and in the News!**

The CHIRAH project has not gone unnoticed by the local media. The Chicago Sun-Times had a story February 12, 2008 and the next day Dr. Ruchi Gupta talked about the study on WTTW's "Chicago Tonight."

During the first interview, we measured the height and weight of participants and then computed the Body Mass Index (BMI). Participants were grouped in four categories\*: underweight, normal, overweight, and obese.

Among adults, 54% were considered obese. We found that this group had worse asthma quality of life, more emergency room visits, and more urgent care visits for asthma.

Among children, 56% were considered to be overweight. Overweight children were more likely to have caregivers who experienced stressful life events, worse health status, or had asthma themselves. We did not find a relationship between childhood obesity and asthma symptoms. While we don't fully understand these findings, we are continuing to study obesity and other measures of asthma severity.

We hope that with the advice and participation of community members we can find a way (an intervention) using exercise and diet information to reduce both obesity and asthma in the inner city of Chicago.

\*Centers for Disease Control



### **CHIRAH ON THE WEB**

CHIRAH has a Web site!

Go to <http://chirah.cchil.org/> to learn the latest about this study.

### **Asthma Tip:**

*Ozone Action Days can be dangerous for people with asthma. Pay attention to these, and be sure to have your rescue inhaler immediately available in case the ozone causes a flare up of your asthma.*

## Austin Pilot Study

Using what we learned from the main CHIRAH study, we planned a special program that would improve the way that persons with asthma care for themselves. We hoped this special program would help people feel they were better at managing their asthma. To see if this program worked, 42 people from two primary care clinics in Austin were asked to participate and they were divided into two groups. Group #1 was invited to four group education sessions led by a social worker and also received six home visits from a community health worker. Group #2 received written educational information that focused on managing asthma and on skills for handling stress. All participants were asked questions by telephone about their health, their asthma, and their quality of life both before the project started and three and six months later.

We found that the people who received group education and home visits were more likely to:

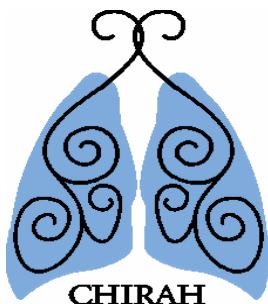
- Feel confident about caring for their asthma (have better self-efficacy)
- Receive asthma action plans from their doctors
- Have a better quality of life, and
- Feel better able to cope with their stressful situations.



We learned that an education program in the community with a community social worker and community health workers improved the ability of adults in Austin to manage their asthma. Next, we hope to study more people and see whether this method can help people with asthma to reduce their asthma symptoms, improve their lung function, and stay out of the hospital.

### **CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR!**

New guidelines for the treatment of asthma were published last year by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Clinical practice guidelines are summaries of what experts believe are the best way to treat a disease. Ask your doctor if she has read these guidelines



**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.

### **Publications**

In addition to this newsletter, a lot has been written about CHIRAH. You may want to go to a local college or university library to find these journals. Some are available through our Web site, or you may call us at (312) 942-3231 and we will mail you a copy.

1. Coping with asthma in immigrant Hispanic families: a focus group study by Mosnaim G., et al. in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology*. 97(4):477-83, 2006 Oct.
2. Assessing the Perceived Stress Scale for African American adults with asthma and low literacy by Sharp LK, et al. in *Journal of Asthma*. 44(4):311-6, 2007 May.
3. Asthma burden in a Chicago city-wide diverse sample of elementary school children by Shalowitz M, et al. in *Ambulatory Pediatrics* 2007; Jul-Aug;7(4):271-7.
4. A 6-item brief measure for assessing perceived control of asthma in culturally diverse patients by Chang C, et al. in *Annals of Allergy and Immunology* 2007; Aug;99(2):130-5.
5. Parental Language and Asthma among Urban Hispanic Children by Mosnaim GS, et al. in *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* 2007;120(5):1160-65.
6. Geographic variability in childhood asthma prevalence by Gupta RS, et al. in *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* 2008;121(3):639-645.

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