

May 08, 2013

Vermont Publishes Asthma Data and State Plan on World Asthma Day

Vermont, a rural state known for its open spaces, clean air and relative absence of industrialization, has one of the highest rates of asthma in the nation. One in 10 Vermont children and approximately 11 percent of adults had asthma in 2010. Asthma is a chronic, recurring disease that can limit a person's ability to function and quality of life.

"Public health officials have been puzzled for years by the high asthma rates in Vermont," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. "This is a serious public health concern and we need to make every effort to reduce the burden of asthma."

May is Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month, and May 7 is World Asthma Day. The Health Department is publishing two reports today – The Burden of Asthma in Vermont, and the Vermont State Asthma Plan (2013-2018). These reports were created with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Public health officials are working to understand why asthma affects so many Vermonters, especially those with lower income and education. Goals of the state asthma plan are to eliminate disparities and promote optimal asthma care through improved diagnosis and treatment. Enhanced patient care coordination and increased education about environmental and occupational triggers are also included in the plan.

Asthma is also included in the state's Environmental Public Health Tracking portal at www.healthvermont.gov/tracking. The Tracking portal was launched in April 2012 to provide data that can policymakers, health professionals, researchers, students, residents and anyone who is interested explore the links between our environment and health. Data about asthma on the Tracking portal may help further understanding about the possible associations between, for example, the role of indoor and outdoor air quality and higher rates of asthma.

Asthma is a respiratory disease that, if not treated, can cause permanent lung damage, disability and sometimes death. An asthma attack is what happens when the airways narrow, in response to a "trigger," making it difficult to breathe. Attacks usually occur in reaction to allergens, certain air pollutants or weather conditions, respiratory illnesses such as a cold or flu, or even stress.

"The state asthma plan is part of our overall plan to improve our approach to chronic disease, and position the state to be at the forefront of health care reform," Dr. Chen said.

Reducing the rate of hospitalizations due to asthma, increasing the percentage of people with asthma who have a written asthma management plan, and who have been advised to make changes at home, school and work, and reducing the percentage of non-smokers who are

exposed to secondhand smoke are also goals of Healthy Vermonters 2020, the state's set of public health goals for the decade.

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Source: Department of Health

Last Updated at: May 08, 2013 08:25:37