



C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Tobacco: A Smoking Gun For Kids' Asthma Attacks

Asthma is a leading chronic health condition among children and frequently causes visits to emergency departments, hospitalizations, and missed school days. The number of children with asthma has tripled over the past several decades.

Asthma attacks can be triggered by tobacco smoke. About 18% of adults smoke in the U.S. overall; in some states, over 25% of adults smoke.

The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents whose children have asthma about factors that cause asthma attacks, and if their children spend time with tobacco smokers.

Asthma Attacks and Smoking

Nationwide, 14% of families have one or more children with asthma. Parents of asthmatic children identify many causes of asthma attacks. While nearly 9 in 10 parents report that getting sick with a cold or the flu is an important cause of asthma attacks, the majority of parents also rate allergies, air quality and tobacco smoke as important factors. Less important factors are food allergies and contact with animals (Table 1).

Table 1. Important Factors Causing Asthma Attacks In Children Reported by Parents

	% Important
Getting sick with a cold or the flu	88%
Outdoor allergies (pollen, grass, weeds, etc.)	81%
Outdoor air quality or air pollution	77%
Tobacco smoke	73%
Indoor allergies (dust mites, mold, cockroaches, etc.)	71%
Contact with furry or hairy animals	48%
Food allergies	30%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2011

Among families with asthmatic kids, nearly half (44%) of parents say their asthmatic child spends time with people who smoke. Typically, the smoker is the asthmatic child's parent (74%). Less often (26%), the smoker is not the parent but is another adult, sibling or the asthmatic child's friend.

Report Highlights

- **Tobacco smoke is reported as a cause of asthma attacks by 73% of parents of asthmatic kids.**
- **Nearly half of parents with asthmatic children say their kids spend time with smokers – who are often the parents themselves.**

Implications

Asthma is the most common chronic illness of children. The results of this poll indicate that parents of kids with asthma identify several triggers of asthma attacks that are potentially preventable. For example, getting a flu vaccine can help avoid attacks due to influenza. Removing various allergens (for example, dust, mold or dander) from the environment can help control asthma symptoms related to the environment or pets.

But, of all the things that families can do to help their kids with asthma, **limiting time with smokers is quite different**—for one key reason. Tobacco smoke is not a natural event like a cold or exposure to pollen. Instead, smoking is all about other people's behaviors—and in the case of asthma, smokers are often asthmatic kids' parents. Individual determination, support from health care providers and payment for quit strategies from insurers can help adults stop smoking and reduce children's asthma attacks.

Just imagine how many fewer asthma attacks might occur if smoking were reduced from 18% to 10%, or even 5% of adults? Recent research suggests that restricting smoking in public places may prevent children's asthma attacks. Health care providers and public health officials have the opportunity to make a big difference in children's asthma, by following parents' insights about smoking as a frequent cause of children's asthma attacks.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered on August 13 - September 7, 2010 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,621) with children from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 to 10 percentage points for the main analysis.

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This Report includes research findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, which do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan.