

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that makes breathing hard at times; in fact, it can make life downright miserable, if not addressed properly. It can develop at any age, but most often it begins in children, generally in the first 5 years of life. For some urban children, asthma rates can be as high as 25% to 40%. It is the leading cause of hospitalization for children, and is the number one chronic condition causing elementary school absenteeism.

It's shown that some children will continue to have asthma into the adult years. In other children, asthma resolves itself; in other words, "they grow out of it". Studies show that as many as half of all children with asthma will outgrow the disorder. Those with a more serious condition will typically have asthma into their adult life and beyond.

The troubling news is that children in inner cities all across this country are more likely to develop asthma, especially if they are from the lower socioeconomic groups of these cities. Medical experts still don't understand why, but it is thought that the poorer living conditions, greater exposure to known asthma triggers, and in many situations, less access to proper health care, contributes to the higher rates of asthma.

American children with asthma in poor, urban areas are especially prone to respiratory health problems as a result of the poor air quality in inner-city most neighborhoods where they live, play, and go to school.

The constant unhealthy air pollution levels, motor vehicle exhaust and other environmental pollutants, are all associated with asthma symptoms, as well as school absences among children in inner-city neighborhoods, according to a study published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (JACI)*.

While air pollution is known to increase risk of severe asthma attacks, this new study shows adverse health effects are more evident among children in poor, urban neighborhoods.

Although asthma affects a higher percentage of black children than white children, it is still controversial whether racial genetics plays a role in this increased rate of asthma, because black children are also more likely to live in inner city areas.

In spite of the medical advances in treatment over the past few decades, asthma cases have increased by more than 60 percent since the early 1980s, and asthma-related deaths have doubled to 5,000 a year.

So, exactly what is causing the asthma epidemic, and what can be done to slow down the continuous increase?

Anyone who is older than 40, can remember that when they were young, it was very unusual for even one child in the whole school to have asthma. Now, it's not uncommon for several children to have asthma in a single classroom!

In a recent article in the Journal of the American Chiropractic Association (JACA), a doctor described a telling scene at a football game he attended with his 13-year-old son: "Someone on the field had a breathing problem. It was hard to see whose son it was, and 15 parents ran to the field with inhalers." This is a powerful image that sums up the dismal condition of far too many of our children.

Many years ago many of today's Baby Boomers lived in well-ventilated houses (sometimes a little too ventilated, especially in the winter!), and the breeze dried and freshened the air, and cleared out mold and other allergens. Now, in most homes that children live in, don't breathe adequately. On top of that, using basements in old, decaying, moldy houses in urban America, as a sleeping area for children increases mold exposure because mold grows in any basement.

But don't think that allergens are responsible alone. Stress factors that many of our children and young people live under today are unbelievable!

From an early age, children living in the inner cities are exposed frequently to the use of drugs, guns, arson, and random violence. They witness injury, suffering, and death, and they respond to these events with fear and grief, often experiencing dramatic ruptures in their development. All of these can act as stress factors, and may induce or aggravate asthma attacks.