

Asthma Triggers in Child Care: Results of MCHD Assessment

A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant allowed Multnomah County Environmental Health (MCEH) to develop and implement an asthma trigger assessment and consultation process to teach child care operators about asthma, environmental asthma triggers and appropriate interventions to reduce triggers in child care facilities.

What was found:

A total of 235 childcare centers and before/after-school programs were assessed, with 143 facilities identified as having asthma trigger problems. The four most common problems were:

1. Asthma management issues (centers did not have asthma action plans for asthmatic children in their care)
2. Ventilation
3. Building issues (floors, walls and ceiling issues such as unusual odors and lack of walk-off mats at entries to the facility)
4. Pollutant sources (such as lack of a fragrance use policy or lack of food consumption area policy)

Multnomah County Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) inspected facilities for asthma triggers and educated child care providers on appropriate interventions to remediate the problems. At the completion of the consultation session, the provider and EHS made an agreement on three issues the provider would remediate. Some agreements were to make behavioral changes with their staff, such as using floor mats to reduce the amount of dirt and dust in the center; and some agreements were structural interventions, such as repairing a leaky roof and/or ensuring the vents worked properly. In addition, a certified asthma educator conducted three well-attended training sessions for child care providers in local libraries. 70% of childcare and 50% of before and after school programs completed their remediation agreements.

Steps you can take:

The following are simple steps to make your environment healthier and free of asthma triggers:

- keep it **dry** to reduce likelihood of mold and mildew developing;
- keep it **clean**, free of dust and dirt;
- keep a **comfortable** air temperature and humidity level;
- **control pollutants** by eliminating fragrant candles and air fresheners;
- **ensure adequate ventilation** by having good air flow to and from the building.

“A healthy environment focuses on the relationships between people and the places where they live, work, play and breathe. Our environment contributes to our good health and well-being. Although the target population of this grant was children in childcare facilities, the principles of reducing asthma triggers can be applied to all other environments where children and adults spend time, especially their homes,” states Multnomah County Health Department Director Lillian Shirley RN, MPH, MPA.

For more information on reducing asthma triggers, contact:
Lila Wickham, Health Department, 503-988-3400, Ext. 22404