

Youth Asthma Exacerbated by Fossil Fuels

Asthma is a serious chronic disease that affects the lungs. Asthma can cause wheezing, difficulty breathing and coughing. Asthma is the most common chronic condition among children and can cause major disruption in a child's life.¹

Asthma in children can be caused by pollutants in the air known as particulate matter – dust, dirt, soot, and smoke – from cars, trucks, and industrial facilities.² Children living in transportation corridors, or within 75 meters of a major roadway, are exposed to disproportionately higher levels of particulate matter and are at the highest risk of developing asthma.³ The emissions from fossil fuel-burning vehicles driven by millions of Californians are poisoning the air our children breathe.

Asthma is a leading cause of school absenteeism⁴

In 2013, almost half of all children with asthma reported missing at least one school day as a result of it.⁵ Studies have shown that school absences due to acute respiratory illnesses followed rises in ozone levels.⁶

Youth asthma disproportionately impacts communities of color

Children bear the brunt of our fossil fuel addiction through traumatic and sometimes life-threatening asthmatic complications. The disparities among children of color with asthma are even starker. Nationally, asthma is more than twice as prevalent⁷ among Black children than white children. These inequities persist throughout adulthood, with Black Americans being “5 times more likely to visit the emergency department due to asthma” and “3 times more likely to die from asthma.”⁸

Hospitalizations & Increased COVID-19 Risk

Children with asthma reported going to the doctor more frequently. Those with asthma are one-third more likely to see their doctor three or more times per year, compared with children without asthma. It is also the third leading cause of hospitalization among those under the age of 15. Studies have shown that people who have moderate to severe asthma may be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19).⁹

¹ [California Air Resources Board](#)

² [Asthma Information Handbook](#)

³ [California Air Resources Board](#). Ostro, Bart. Traffic pollution and children's health: refining estimates of exposure for the East Bay children's respiratory health study. Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

⁴ California Department of Education [Asthma Management Guidelines](#)

⁵ [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

⁶ [California Air Resources Board](#). Peters, John M. Epidemiologic investigation to identify chronic effects of ambient air pollutants in Southern California.

⁷ [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

⁸ [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Asthma Disparities in America](#)

⁹ [America's Health Rankings](#)



By the Numbers¹⁰:

- **13.7% of children** under 18 in California had chronic asthma in 2014.
- **1 in 12 children had asthma** in 2017.¹¹
- **Over two-thirds of California children** with asthma have experience persistent severity.¹²
- A recent study estimates that asthma costs the United States **\$81.9 billion annually** in medical costs, mortality, and missed school or workdays.¹³
- In 2016, **2.8 per million children died** as a result of asthma.¹⁴

Solutions

Our children cannot wait for another generation of changes to take effect. It is time California policymakers take steps to immediately reduce our exposure to toxins in the air that cause and worsen asthma in children.

Clean air policies that can be enacted immediately to reduce fossil fuel emissions and improve health include:

- Imposing stricter emissions standards for new vehicles and allowing states to have flexibility in enforcing their own higher standards;
- Approving and supporting immediate adoption of alternative fuels, like biofuels, electricity, and renewable hydrogen;
- Taking measurable steps to reduce particulate matter and toxic emissions from gasoline and diesel fuel;
- Cleaning up abandoned oil infrastructure and extraction wells;
- Keeping oil in the ground by halting new oil extraction permits;
- Ensuring stricter enforcement, penalties, and higher taxes on petroleum extraction;
- Funding emissions reduction programs and monitoring at the community level that have immediate, measurable results; and
- Increasing access to free public transit.

¹⁰ [California Air Resources Board](#)

¹¹ [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America](#)

¹² [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

¹³ [American Thoracic Society](#)

¹⁴ [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

