

May is National Asthma & Allergy Awareness Month

Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease caused by genetic, environmental, and occupational factors in which the lung's airways narrow or inflame. People of all ages can have asthma.



What is an asthma attack?

Asthma attacks occur in response to exposure to an asthma trigger, such as tobacco smoke, air pollution, dust mites, mold, pests, and allergies. Common symptoms of asthma attacks include tight chest, difficulty breathing, and coughing.

What are allergies?

Allergies are the immune system's response to a foreign substance, known as allergens.



What are allergy symptoms?

Allergy symptoms depend on the type of allergen exposure. They can affect the airways, sinuses, skin, and digestive system. Common allergy symptoms include itchy and watery eyes, sneezing, itchy and runny nose, rashes and hives, and stomach cramps. Symptom severity varies by person, ranging from irritation to anaphylaxis.

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening reaction to an allergen, such as inability to breathe, that requires immediate medical care.

Learn More!

- [All About Allergies](#)
- [How To Control Asthma](#)
- [Pennsylvania Asthma Control Program](#)
- [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America](#)



ASTHMA IN PENNSYLVANIA



According to data from the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council, in 2020:

- Approximately 4,885 Pennsylvanians were hospitalized for asthma (62% female versus 38% male).
- Nearly 3 out of 10 Pennsylvanians hospitalized for asthma were under 20 years old.
- The age-adjusted asthma hospitalization rate was 12.3 among Black people and 7.2 among Hispanic people, and 2.0 among White people.

What resources are available from the Pennsylvania Department of Health?

The Pennsylvania Asthma Control Program works to reduce asthma morbidity, mortality, and disparities. Pennsylvania's Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology's (DEHE) [Environmental Health Indicators Map](#) displays asthma hospitalization data by county. DEHE also produces educational materials on the [health-related impacts of poor air quality](#), including asthma and allergies.

How can asthma attacks & allergies be avoided?

- Avoid exposure to asthma triggers and allergens.
- Keep your home dry and clean to prevent mold, dust, and pests.
- Use [certified asthma and allergy friendly products](#).
- Take medications prescribed by your doctor.
- Have an action plan in the event of an [asthma attack](#) or [allergic reaction](#).
- Track [local outdoor air quality data](#) and [allergy levels and pollen count forecasts](#) and stay indoors when the outdoor air quality is unhealthy or pollen counts are high.

