

Albuquerque, NM

Evaluating Elementary School Asthma Program Yields Valuable Lessons

Problem Overview

More than 5 million school-aged youth have asthma. Asthma is a leading cause of school absence related to chronic illness. Asthma also results in more hospitalizations than any other childhood disease. The asthma-related death rate for children under age 19 has increased by nearly 80% since 1980. Asthma disproportionately affects minority groups and families with lower socioeconomic status.

Program/Activity Description

The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), in collaboration with CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, established an asthma program in 2003. By 2006, all 84 elementary schools were participating in the program. Program components included forming an Asthma Advisory Committee, hiring an asthma nurse coordinator, standardizing the procedures for managing and documenting students with asthma, providing a six-session curriculum called *Open Airways* for students with asthma, and helping students without health insurance obtain access to health care.

In 2006, APS asked CDC to help evaluate aspects of the program. The evaluation explored how well students retained knowledge about and skills for managing their asthma from elementary into middle school. The evaluation also assessed students' confidence about managing their asthma.

Program/Activity Outcomes

The evaluation of the APS asthma program showed that after participating in the *Open Airways* curriculum in elementary school, middle school students were more confident about how to manage their asthma and what to do after asthma symptoms had started than about how to anticipate or prevent an asthma episode.

Students reported that the elementary school asthma program had provided them with helpful information and skills. However, some middle school students continued to have asthma management difficulties such as asthma-related hospitalizations and challenges participating in physical education classes.

Recognizing that middle school students might benefit from booster sessions to help them retain key knowledge and skills, APS is developing supplementary asthma-related services for middle school students. School systems with asthma programs may benefit from assessing the needs of their middle school students and providing additional services when required.



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