

Fact Sheet: Health Disparities in Inadequate and Unhealthy Housing

Findings from the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011*

In recent decades, the United States has made substantial progress in improving our residents' health and reducing disparities, but ongoing economic, racial/ethnic, and other social disparities in health still exist.

Now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011*, which is the first in a series of regular reports that focus on selected topics that are important to CDC's efforts to eliminate disparities.

Released as an *MMWR Supplement*, the report contains 22 topical essays that address disparities in health-care access, exposure to environmental hazards, mortality, morbidity, behavioral risk factors, and social determinants of selected health problems at the national level. The report provides an analysis of the recent trends and ongoing variations in health disparities and inequalities in selected social and health indicators. The data highlight the considerable and persistent gaps between the healthiest people and the least healthy. By documenting these gaps, CDC hopes to spur further action and attention to these issues at the federal, state and local levels.

Key Findings in Inadequate and Unhealthy Housing Disparities

- The proportion of unhealthy housing units decreased from 2007 to 2009.
- Among housing units classified as unhealthy, the magnitude of disparities decreased across racial/ethnic, income, and education-level categories.
- The disparity by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, and education level, however, is still substantial. Non-Hispanic blacks had the highest percentage of householders living in inadequate, unhealthy housing, followed by Hispanics and American Indians/Alaska Natives.

What Can Be Done

Homes' lack of structural and safety features can increase risk for injuries, elevate blood lead levels, and exacerbate other conditions, while poor indoor air quality contributes to cancers, cardiovascular disease, and asthma. According to the *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Healthy Homes*, effective interventions to prevent home hazards include improving ventilation, avoiding the use of wastewater systems to dispose of toxic chemicals, using integrated pest management, installing grab bars in showers, adding handrails to stairs, installing working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and installing four-sided fences around pools.

CDC will accelerate its efforts to eliminate health disparities with a focus on surveillance, analysis, and reporting of disparities and the identification and application of evidence-based strategies to achieve health equity.



What Can Be Done, continued

CDC and its partners can use the findings in this periodic report to raise awareness and understanding of groups that experience the greatest health disparities. The findings also can help motivate increased efforts to intervene at the state, tribal, and local levels to address health disparities and inequalities.

Recommended Actions to Reduce Health Disparities

1. Increase community awareness of disparities as persistent problems that represent some of the most pressing health challenges in the U.S.
2. Set priorities among disparities to be addressed at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels
3. Articulate valid reasons to expend resources to reduce and ultimately eliminate priority disparities
4. Implement the dual strategy of universal and targeted intervention strategies based on lessons learned from successes in reducing certain disparities (e.g., the virtual elimination of disparities in certain vaccination rates among children)
5. Aim to achieve a faster rate of improvement among vulnerable groups by allocating resources in proportion to need and a commitment to closing gaps in health, longevity, and quality of life



For More Information

The *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011* is available online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr.