Health Disparities in the Medi-Cal Population

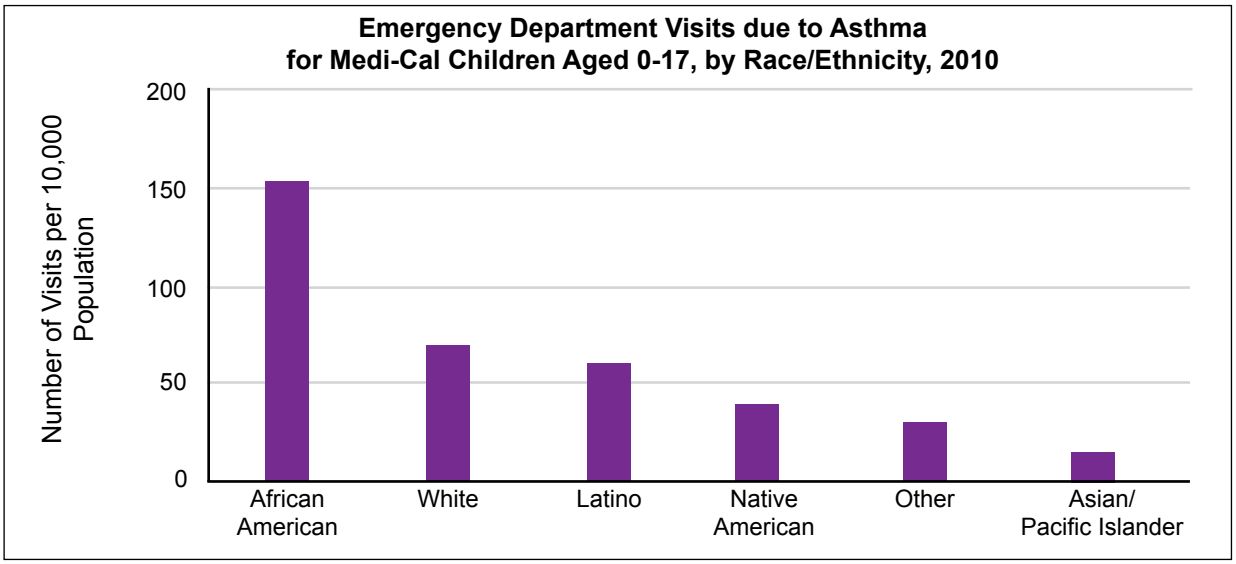
Childhood Asthma Emergency Department Visits

Asthma is the most prevalent condition among infants and children up to age 17.[1-2] There are nearly 1.5 million children in California that have asthma, and the condition makes it difficult for this group to exercise, play, and attend school.[3] The causes of asthma are complex, but there are risk factors such as exposure to air pollution that are at least partially modifiable.[4]

There is evidence that children unable to manage their asthma tend to utilize emergency departments (ED) at increased rates.[5] As such, better management of this chronic disease is critical to reducing ED visits and improving the quality of life for children with asthma.[6]

The statewide ED visit rate for asthma was 73.0 per 10,000 children aged 0 to 17. This was similar to the rate for the Medi-Cal population of 72.6 per 10,000.[7] As with Californians overall,[3] there were strong racial/ethnic disparities among children in the Medi-Cal program. For example, African Americans were over eight times more likely than Asians/Pacific Islanders to visit the ED for asthma-related complications (see Figure below).

Figure



Source: Numerators: Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) Patient Discharge Data, 2010; Denominators: Medi-Cal MIS/DSS, 2010.
Note: Members eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid were excluded.

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Link to Data Sources and Methods