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

Emergency Department Visits due to Asthma
for Medi-Cal Children Aged 0-17, by Race/Ethnicity, 2010

Note: Members eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid were excluded.


Link to Data Sources and Methods