

In the News

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WE-ACT Holds Forum to Address Health Effects of Mold in NYC

Mar 28 – West Harlem Environmental Action held a forum that addressed the impact of mold on the health of community residents and steps that they can take to protect themselves.

Ginger Chew, ScD of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health explained that mold is a respiratory health concern because it releases microscopic spores in the air that can enter the lungs. "Once in the lungs, they can cause asthma-like symptoms such as coughing and chest tightness, and exacerbate or possibly promote the development of asthma," Dr. Chew said. "These allergic reactions might not manifest immediately after the first exposure, but could occur after repeated exposures."

Chris D'Andrea of the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene added that mold is more prone to breed in older buildings that may have a history of housing violations. He stated that the highest numbers of mold complaints were isolated primarily in Northern Manhattan, South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Jamaica, Queens; these low-income areas have a history of high asthma rates.

Bill Sothorn of Microecologies criticized landlords' approach to mold. He argued that the four common problems are not making repairs quickly due to perceived high cost, literally painting over the problem (a bad approach since mold uses paint as food to grow), failing to correct water damage sources (i.e. leaky pipes), and not providing adequate barriers to protect tenants from exposure.

Other strategies discussed included forming partnerships with other communities battling mold and lobbying legislators to support bills that protect the public from mold exposure.

Asthma Initiative Names Recipients for 2006 World Asthma Day Grant

May 1 - The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Asthma Initiative announced five winners of its annual World Asthma Day mini grants.

For the past two years, Asthma Initiative has been awarding grants to various organizations to raise asthma awareness. This year's recipients, all NYCAP members, received a total of \$45,000.

The winners are Northern Manhattan Asthma Basics for Children Initiative (Manhattan), Harlem Hospital Center (Manhattan), Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizen Council/Hope Gardens Multi-Service Center (Brooklyn), South Bronx Asthma Partnership (The Bronx), and Urban Health Plan (The Bronx).

Community Asthma Education Committee Discusses Environment's Role on Asthma

April 11 – The NYC Asthma Partnership's Community Asthma Education committee held its monthly meeting to discuss how its members can empower their communities to take action against environmental triggers of asthma.

Committee members reiterated stories that they heard from community residents about environmental factors that worsen asthma such as diesel exhaust from idling school buses and mold resulting from housing poorly maintained by unscrupulous landlords. They also commented on how families in the areas they serve may feel powerless to change their environment to reduce exposure to asthma triggers.

The committee suggested that health professionals should remind residents of the individual and collective power they possess to reduce exposure to environmental triggers. Examples of these "fight back" tactics include keeping windows closed if they live near a highway or lobbying government to enforce existing environmental regulations in vulnerable communities. Some committee members cautioned that health professionals, when working with the community, must be willing to listen and respect people's input, avoiding the temptation of being judgmental of those they're helping, and acknowledging the small victories won by residents who organize to fight against substandard environments.

The committee meets every month to discuss a variety of topics linked to asthma. For more information about meeting dates and times, email inquires to Marci Lopez at ml2509@columbia.edu.

Words from the Co-Chairs

Greetings fellow NYCAPers. This May (Asthma and Allergy Awareness month), NYCAP continues to coordinate activities to educate the public about factors that can trigger asthma. As representatives united to fight this respiratory disease, we must let those in our communities know that they have the power to improve their environment. Communities play an important role in influencing regulations that improve environmental conditions that contribute to asthma. By reminding New Yorkers this month and throughout the year that they have the power to lobby for change in policies that affect their health, we can help our communities truly make their indoor and outdoor environments better places for their lungs.



Lorna E. Davis, M.S.
Co-Chair
NYCAP Steering Committee
Director, NYC Asthma Initiative



Louise Vetter
Co-Chair
NYCAP Steering Committee
CEO, American Lung Association of the City of New York, Inc.

Research, News, and Updates Related to Asthma

Bronx Rep Pushes Bills to Rein in Childhood Asthma

NYS Assemblymember Peter Rivera announced last month that he will be co-sponsoring three bills in an effort to help reduce asthma hospitalizations among children in the state.

The proposed legislation would focus on two contributing factors linked to the respiratory disease: exposure to diesel exhaust and better access to asthma medication. The first bill, number A09874, would mandate school administrators to enforce “no idling” laws for school buses and other vehicles on or near school property. The bill also includes the formation of an advisory council in each school district statewide to create a plan to replace diesel-powered school buses with cleaner-fuel alternatives. The second bill, A09890, would remove asthma medications from the Preferred Prescription Drug list, allowing state residents access to a larger variety of asthma drugs. The last bill, A10504, would also address the issue of access to medication by requiring that schools to have a minimum of two nebulizers to expedite the time needed to treat a student’s asthma attack until professional medical attention can be provided.

All three bills are currently in the Education and Health Committees of the State Assembly. If approved by the Assembly, the bills must undergo approval by the State Senate before appearing in front of the Governor to be either signed into law or vetoed.

EPA Proposes New Standards for PM 2.5 Levels

Last December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed revising the national standards for particulate pollution as required by the Clean Air Act. According to EPA, the revisions would strengthen the fine particle standard, and would improve and refocus on those particles that are associated with public health concerns.

However the proposed changes have caused controversy among many health and environmental groups because they claim EPA is not following the more stringent recommendations of its own scientific advisory committee.

EPA collected public comments about the proposed changes until April 17, 2006 and a final decision is expected in September.

“No Repairs? No Loan!” Banks’ New Message to Landlords with Housing Violations

Housing advocacy groups struggling with landlords who refuse to correct housing code violations may be able to get help from an unlikely ally: banks.

Housing Here and Now, a housing coalition, and Citigroup and New York Community Bank, announced last month that they formed an agreement to use the banks’ financial muscle as leverage to force bad landlords to fix any dilapidated properties they own.

Under the agreement, landlords applying for a loan for a building will be screened by the banks to uncover any history of housing code violations using record from NYC Housing Preservation, and Development and the housing advocacy coalition. If housing violations are discovered, the banks will force the landlords to make repairs before any money from the loan is released. In addition, the banks will conduct annual inspections of the mortgaged properties to ensure decent maintenance by the landlords.

This agreement may also represent a new tactic for community organizations and residents dealing with asthma triggers in the home (i.e. mold and rodent infestation) to force landlords to make adequate repairs.

Announcements

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Asthma Training Institute is conducting a workshop, "Introduction to Health Education Approaches for Literacy Learners", on Thursday, June 1, 2006. It will be held 9:30am-12pm at 505 Eighth Avenue. For obtain a registration form, email inquiries to either eschwols@health.nyc.gov or klevine@health.nyc.gov.

The NYC Asthma Partnership will be hosting its semi-annual meeting on Monday, June 5, 2006. It will be held 8:30am-12:30pm at New York University's Kimmel Center, 60 Washington Square Park South. This meeting marks NYCAP's Fifth Anniversary. To register, email Kara Cadag at kcadag@health.nyc.gov.

Urban Health Plan, in partnership with the South Bronx Asthma Partnership, Healthy Nest, and Assured Environments is holding a forum on June 7, 2006, 9am-12:30pm, to discuss asthma and integrated pest management. To register, call 646-505-9577 or send an email message to info@healthy-nest.com.

The American Lung Association of the City of New York will be holding its annual Asthma Walk on Saturday, June 10, 2006 at Battery Park in Manhattan. All proceeds support the Association's fight against asthma in NYC. To register, call 212-889-3370 or visit their website at www.alany.org.

1199 SEIU Training & Upgrading Fund is hosting its Fourth Annual Asthma Symposium on Saturday June 17, 2006, 7:45 am-3:30 pm, at Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium at 310 West 43rd Street in Manhattan. To register or for more information, call 212-894-4390 or email institute@1199etjisp.org.

Northern Manhattan Asthma Basics for Children Initiative, in collaboration with Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership, is hosting its annual asthma symposium on Tuesday, June 20, 2006. The event, which will be held 9am-2pm, will feature speakers talking about asthma, bed bugs, diabetes, nutrition, and obesity. To register, contact Gloria Thomas at gb20@columbia.edu.

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Asthma Initiative and Urban Health Plan's Asthma Street Relief Program. were selected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as model asthma programs that address environmental triggers based on an international study, The Asthma Health Outcomes Project, conducted by the University of Michigan School of Public Health, which assessed over 400 asthma programs. More information at <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/ahop.html>.

NYCAP Steering Committee Member Diane Strom was featured in a Metro news article on April 25, 2006. The story was about NYS Assemblymember Peter Rivera's announcement in the Bronx to co-sponsor three bills to address the issue of childhood asthma in the state. To read the article, it can be access at http://ny.metro.us/metro/local/article/Bronx_officials_attack_asthma_with_bill/2228.html#email

For A Better Bronx, a non-profit community organization, is seeking a candidate for its Intern position. Duties are helping to coordinate and lead workshops and focus groups mostly on environmental health issues (i.e. asthma, lead, etc.). The person must be either a college or graduate student interested in community health education. Bilingual skills in English and Spanish preferable. To apply, contact Marian Feinberg at marian.fabb@earthlink.net.

A Photo Moment



Community Asthma Education Committee Co-chair Marcy Lopez reviews members' comments about the environment's role on asthma at April 11th committee meeting.



Representatives from various community, health, and environmental groups listen to speakers talk about mold's impact on health at WE-ACT's March 28th mold forum.

Photo Courtesy of West Harlem Environmental Action



NYS Assemblymember Peter Rivera, surrounded by supporters, holds a press conference on April 24th announcing his support of three bills to fight asthma.

Photo Courtesy of Asthma Free School Zone

New York City Asthma Partnership
www.nycapnyc.org

Steering Committee

Co-Chair: Lorna E. Davis, MS
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Co-Chair: Louise Vetter
American Lung Association of the City of New York, Inc.

Communications Committee

Chair: Kathy Garrett-Szymanski, RRT
Long Island College Hospital

Community Asthma Education Committee

Co-Chair: Sebastian Bonner, PhD
New York Academy of Medicine

Co-Chair: Marcy Lopez, AE-C
Columbia University School of Public Health

Data and Research Committee

Chair: Robert Silverman, MD
Long Island Jewish Medical Center
Department of Emergency Medicine

Environment Committee

Co-Chair: Juan Correa, MD, MPH
Columbia University, Department of Environmental Health Sciences

Co-Chair: Marian Feinberg
For a Better Bronx

Schools Committee

Co-Chair: Alma Idehen
NYC Department of Education

Co-Chair: Jeanette Stingone, MPH
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Daycare Sub-Committee

Co-Chair: Sally Findley, PhD
Columbia University of Public Health

Co-Chair: Kim Van Atta, RN
Grand Street Settlement

Members at Large

David Evans, PhD
Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons

James Langford
The Children's Aid Society

Asthma Coalitions Represented on Steering Committee

Diane Strom, CSW
South Bronx Asthma Partnership

Rekha Viswanathan, MPH
North Brooklyn Asthma Action Alliance

NYCAP Newsletter

Leon Tulton, MPH
Editor & Writer

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To publish announcements in the NYCAP newsletter, please email Leon Tulton at ltulton@health.nyc.gov



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