

## **Environmental Focus Group Findings**

### **February 23, 2004 Focus Group**

Seven parents of children with asthma participated in an evening focus group. Six of the adults were female; one was male. Five of the adults were African American, one was Asian, and one was Caucasian. While socioeconomic status was not asked, five of the adults rented their home/apartment while two owned their home.

### **Key Findings/Themes**

**Parents received most of their information about environmental triggers that may affect their child's asthma from their health care provider and in written form.**

Three parents indicated that they sought out additional information through the internet, while four parents indicated that they have not used the internet for additional asthma information.

**All parents indicated that they have already made environmental changes in their homes to remove asthma triggers.**

The most common changes mentioned by parents included dusting "a lot" and not allowing tobacco smoke in their homes or cars. Other changes mentioned included:

- Used a humidifier to reduce the dust in the air and/or reduce "nose bleeds" from the dry air (3);
- Used mattress covers on their child's bed (3);
- Removed carpet from the child's bedroom (2);
- Got rid of family dog (2);
- Stopped using products with strong odors such as cologne, cleaners, and lotions (2);
- Removed feather pillows (1); and
- Removed the fabric curtains for their child's bedroom (1).

**Parents reported that the motivating factor for them to make environmental modifications to their home was a severe asthma episode such as a hospitalization and/or an emergency room visit.**

**Most parents want a professional to conduct the environmental assessment while simultaneously providing the checklist for the parent to conduct their own assessment, periodic reassessment, and maintenance over time (6).** One parent indicated that she would not allow a professional to conduct the home assessment, rather, she would conduct it herself.

**While parents initially said that they would do anything to make their home more healthy for their child, there were limits in terms of effort and expense.**

- Parents indicated that they would be willing to make a lot of environmental modifications, such as take up carpet in a child's bedroom, get rid of the dog, or

- dust frequently. However, all parents indicated that they would not be willing to move.
- While parents are reportedly willing to take up carpet in their child's bedroom, taking up old, mildewy carpet in other rooms of the home is reportedly too expensive and needs to happen over time.
  - One parent indicated that they would not be willing to get rid of the cat, because the cat catches the mice that are in the home.
  - One barrier to making environmental modifications is the need to make multiple day and/or overnight childcare arrangements for their child with asthma. This would remove the child from the home while the trigger is moved around and released into the air.

**Owner-occupied versus rental housing determines the extent that parents are able to make environmental changes.**

Landlords are reportedly unwilling to make environmental changes or reportedly do not believe the complaints from parents about environmental conditions.

**Parents suggested other efforts that the ALAMN could make to assist their child with asthma, including:**

- Get more information about the school inhaler law out.
- Provide more education on environmental issues.
- Increase awareness of the seriousness of childhood asthma.
- Work with schools and childcare centers to remove carpet and blackboards.
- Provide education/awareness for children without asthma about what asthma is, signs and symptoms, and how to support children with asthma.
- Provide support groups for parents with asthma, especially families with newly diagnosed children.
- Provide education to parents about new types of medications available.
- Provide a place for parents to exchange information with one another.

**March 16, 2004 Focus Group**

Twelve parents of children with asthma participated in an evening focus group. Eleven of the adults were female; one was male. Eight of the adults were African American, one was Asian, and three were Caucasian. While socioeconomic status was not asked, all parents had children enrolled in Head Start.

**Key Findings/Themes**

**Parents receive information about environmental triggers for their child's asthma primarily from their child's physician or from the emergency room and in written form.** Other avenues for information for triggers included the internet, from experience, and through discussions with other parents.

**Parents had a number of questions and concerns about the information provided by physicians.** Several concerns included:

- Some physicians are hesitant to call it asthma;
- Is asthma hereditary?
- When is it really asthma and when is it just a reaction to allergies?
- Do you out grow asthma or “is the concept of a lifetime illness pushed because of economics to get people hooked on medications?”
- “When I leave the emergency room, I have four prescriptions to fill and only \$50. Which of the prescriptions is most important for me to fill?”

**Parents have taken a variety of steps to remove/reduce triggers in their home, including:**

- Not allowing smoking in their home
- Do not use air fresheners
- Clean when the children are not at home
- Use allergy filters in the furnace
- Keep windows open at night
- Don’t use fans in the home
- Use humidifiers
- Do not allow shoes in the house because they might spread pollen
- Quit using powders such as Ajax and carpet fresheners
- Pull up carpets
- Vacuum the cat
- Remove pets from the home
- Changed cleaning supplies to those with less odor

**The parents were divided on whether they would want a professional to conduct their home assessment or conduct a self-assessment.**

- “I want a professional to do it for the safety of my children.”
- “I would be concerned that the professional would make judgments about the cleanliness of my home.”

**Parents indicated that they would be willing to make any changes necessary to remove the environmental triggers.** However, when asked about specific changes, few parents were willing to quit smoking or get rid of the pets.

**Parents indicated several barriers to making environmental changes.**

- There are limits to what you can do in a rental unit. For example, you might not be able to pull up the carpets or clean them.
- Cost of making the modifications.
- It is difficult to find the energy to thoroughly clean the house weekly.