Does Asthma Management Among Children Differ by Race or Insurance Type?

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“Yes,” say Lister Hill scholar Keith Elder and colleagues. “In this study, whites were significantly more likely to have an asthma management plan than Non-Hispanic blacks or Hispanics. We also found that children who reported Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage were twice as likely to have an asthma management plan compared to privately insured children.”

Approximately five million children in the U.S. suffer from asthma. Minority children with asthma may be particularly vulnerable since more than half are from households that are poor or near poor. Medicaid-eligible children are more likely to be minority, and to suffer poor outcomes from asthma. In a previous study, primary care providers of Medicaid-eligible children reported more difficult communication with low-income families than higher-income families which can mean minority and low-income children are less likely to receive recommended services. A tailored asthma management plan is recommended for the long-term treatment of pediatric asthma and includes information on what to do at home, when to call the clinician, and when to seek emergency care.

To identify the relationship between insurance types and having an asthma management plan, the investigators analyzed data from the 2002 and 2003 National Health Interview Survey. The percentage of children with asthma that had private insurance was 54%; Medicaid, 25%; CHIP, 5%; Tricare, 2%; and uninsured, 7%. Having private insurance did not result in higher rates of having an asthma management plan, as expected; possibly because children with private insurance are healthier overall than children who have public insurance. Public health insurance programs may be gaining more widespread acceptance by private practitioners, which may have led to the children insured by CHIP being more likely to have an asthma management plan.

“Health disparities still exist in the American medical system and this issue is a major health policy priority,” say the researchers. “Mandating all insurers to provide an asthma management plan to children with asthma may reduce the race-based inequities and differences in asthma management plan status.”