

Indoor air triggers asthma attacks_part 1

Causes and Effects of Sick Schools Vary

In this special report, Sick Schools: A National Problem, Education World examines the varied causes and effects of environmental problems in our nation's schools. Research has found links between learning and environmental contaminants. Are school environments resulting in increased numbers of children with learning disabilities and ADHD? Can sick schools affect student concentration? Can school overcrowding exacerbate problems?

The most dramatic increase in health problems caused by environmental conditions has been childhood asthma rates. The EPA report states that the number of children with asthma in the United States increased 75 percent between 1980 and 1994. That rise affected all racial and ethnic groups.

Asthma diagnoses have increased at even greater rates for children under five years old during the past 15 years, increasing about 160 percent, notes Mary Smith, director of the Indoor Environments Division of the EPA. "Nobody really knows why it's happening," she says. "But it is true that indoor air triggers asthma attacks and causes asthma."

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