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Contact: Rebecca Hut  
The Children's Health Fund

Sean Cassidy  
Dan Klores Communications

**JAMA PEDIATRICS JOURNAL PUBLISHED STUDY REPORTS**  
**40-PLUS PERCENT**  
**OF NYC HOMELESS CHILDREN HAVE ASTHMA**

***CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND FINDS HIGHEST ASTHMA RATE EVER  
REPORTED IN ANY PEDIATRIC POPULATION***

**"Most Common Chronic Condition in Children" Routinely Undetected and Undertreated**

**New York, NY— March 02, 2004** – In a study published today, **The Children's Health Fund (CHF)** reports **40 percent** of **New York City's homeless children** have moderate or severe **asthma** -- more than **six times the national average**. Asthma in homeless children is likely to be severe and substantially undertreated. In addition, no more than 10 percent of the children with severe asthma were found to be receiving appropriate medications.

The study, published in the **March issue** of ***The Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine***, one of JAMA/Archives journals, also suggests that the psycho-social factors that confront homeless children and families such as stress, trauma, maternal depression and mental health issues, are linked to the high rates of severe asthma and its widespread undertreatment. Although hospitalization rates for children with asthma in New York City have declined in recent years, it remains a major problem for children in the homeless population.

**Shawn Bowen, M.D.**, director of the Children's Health Fund's **Childhood Asthma Initiative (CAI)** remains very concerned about the growing population of homeless

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children and the severe medical problems they continue to experience. "When the study began in 1998, there were **9,400** children in the family shelter system. Today there are more than **16,000** children living in the shelters under difficult circumstances where chronic stress and depression add to other risk factors that exacerbate the asthma crisis." Dr. Bowen also emphasizes that "the CAI is making a significant difference for children with asthma, dramatically improving care, dealing with underlying factors and reducing hospitalizations."

The Children's Health Fund (CHF) with the support of the **Schering-Plough Corporation** and the **Picower Foundation**, conducted this study in response to extremely frequent encounters with homeless children affected by asthma, the leading chronic medical condition afflicting children in the United States.

According to CHF's president **Irwin Redlener, M.D.**, also associate dean of the **Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health**: "In addition to those families who are homeless, we have a serious and growing problem here in New York and nationally with large numbers of children lacking health insurance and living in or near poverty." He continued "All of this means reduced access to health care, including asthma treatment. The problem is that failure to identify and treat such conditions leads to potentially life-long medical consequences and related problems, including significant difficulties in school."

**Diane E. McLean, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H.**, of **Columbia University** and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, New York, Dr. Bowen, Dr. Redlener, and colleagues investigated the prevalence of asthma among 740 children whose families entered three New York City family shelters. Prior to this study no information was available on the prevalence of asthma among this population.

The study concludes that in the United States, children of color, children who live in urban medically underserved communities and children whose families have limited economic resources have excessively high rates of asthma. Indicating that identifying high-risk groups of children is important in the development of successful interventions. The CHF's Childhood Asthma Initiative includes intensive family education, innovative educational materials, social work support in the field and specially adapted clinical care guidelines.

The researchers found that of the children in the shelters, **26.9 percent** had a prior physician diagnosis of asthma. In addition, **12.9 percent** of the children without a prior physician diagnosis of asthma reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe persistent asthma. The study found that few of the children with persistent asthma received anti-inflammatory treatment.

**The Children's Health Fund** works nationally to provide medical care to the most medically underserved population – homeless and disadvantaged children. To date, The Children's Health Fund's national network of 17 pediatric programs has treated more than 300,000 children. More information can be found at The Children's Health Fund web site at [HREF="http://www.childrenshealthfund.org/"](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org/) MACROBUTTON HTMLResAnchor [www.childrenshealthfund.org](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org).