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COUNTY

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NEWS RELEASE

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New program gives doctors a glimpse into homes of pediatric asthma patients

A new Multnomah County program will offer physicians a glimpse of their patients' home environments so they can better tailor medical plans to meet the unique needs of their pediatric asthma patients. The program's goal is to reduce sick days and risk of death, and improve the quality of life for children living with asthma.

The Multnomah County [Asthma Inspection Referral Program](#) (AIR) is a web-based referral system allowing doctors, nurses or other health professionals to refer their pediatric patients with asthma for a free home inspection, conducted by an environmental health specialist. **All children living in Multnomah County under the age of 18 with an asthma diagnosis are eligible for this free program. Families will be eligible for this program regardless of income level. Families of children with asthma are encouraged to seek a referral through their health care provider.**

The Multnomah County environmental home inspector is trained to identify environmental asthma triggers in the home including mold and chronic dampness, leaks, pest infestations, drafty doors and windows, no heat, poor ventilation and damaged carpeting. After the inspection is complete, referring providers and families will receive an inspection report and recommendations to improve indoor air quality. This can be used to individualize the child's asthma treatment plan. AIR inspectors also work with the families and with permission of the family, with landlords, to eliminate poor housing conditions by linking them to community resources.

Asthma is a lung condition in which the airways are easily inflamed and/or constricted. When airway swelling and constriction occur, a person with asthma experiences shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing. In addition to a medication plan, improving air quality in the home helps to prevent asthma attacks. Irritants in the home that may make asthma worse are tobacco or other smoke, mold, animal dander, household chemicals such as air fresheners, and dust from cockroaches, dust mites, pollens or pollution.

According to A 2008 report from Oregon Department of Human Services, "[Burden of Asthma in Oregon Report](#)": in Oregon approximately 9.9% of adults and 8.3% of children have asthma. This means that more than 355,000 Oregonians have asthma. In 2007, approximately 75,000 Oregon children are estimated to have asthma. There has been little change over time in the percent of children and youths with asthma in Oregon.

Since 1997 the annual cost of asthma-related hospitalizations in Multnomah County has increased from approximately \$3.3 million to about \$7 million in 2007, according to Multnomah County Health Department's [Community Health Assessment Quarterly – Asthma](#). There were 2,588 asthma-related hospitalizations in 2002-2006 among Multnomah county residents, costing nearly \$29 million in hospital charges.

The [AIR](#) program is the newest of four Multnomah County prevention/intervention programs addressing substandard housing conditions and the links to health problems including asthma. These programs include [The Healthy Homes Program](#) the [Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#), and the [Rental Housing Inspection and Complaints Program](#).

"This is one more strategy in our mission to improve the health of childhood asthma patients and reduce the environmental triggers that send children to hospital emergency rooms," said Lila Wickham, manager of Multnomah County Environmental Health.

For more information call Multnomah County's Healthy Homes Hotline and choose the Housing Inspections option: (503) 988-4AIR, email air@co.multnomah.or.us or visit the website at www.multco.us/AIR

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Note: see [Multnomah County Community Health Assessment Quarterly - Asthma](#) for statistics on asthma