

## Environmental Disparities

access advocacy  
african american  
asian american bone  
density cancer children  
cardiovascular  
cholesterol chronic  
disease churches  
collaboration community  
cultural competence  
DIABETES diet disability  
disparities  
diversity education  
environment evaluation  
ethnicity exposure faith  
community financial  
need goals grassroots  
health insurance  
healthcare providers  
heart disease higher  
rates healthy hispanic  
american hypertension  
HIV/AIDS insurance  
infant mortality  
initiative intervention  
language barriers LEAD  
life expectancy lifestyle  
low birthweight  
literacy malnutrition  
medicare/medicaid men  
mental health native  
american nutrition  
obesity partnership  
overweight pollution  
prenatal prescription  
drugs prevention quality  
of care race risk factors  
RURAL schools self-  
esteem socioeconomic  
solutions stereotypes  
surveillance technology  
teenagers tobacco  
tracking transportation  
treatment TRUST urban  
underutilization  
unequal care under-  
representation  
violence vaccinations  
water quality welfare policy  
women wellness white  
workplace diversity

Environmental factors, ranging from tobacco smoke to chemicals to dietary habits, can cause serious health issues. Research has linked incidence and severity of cancer, asthma, Alzheimer's, autism, birth defects, endometriosis, infertility, and multiple sclerosis to environmental contaminants.<sup>1</sup> For example:

- Asthma is the most common chronic disease in children and has been strongly linked to environmental exposures.<sup>1</sup>
- Learning disabilities have been associated with toxic chemical exposure and affect between 5 and 10 percent of children in public schools.<sup>1</sup>
- High bone lead levels have been linked to low birth weight.<sup>5</sup> In addition, DDT is linked to preterm birth, a leading cause of infant death in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- Evidence suggests that Parkinson's disease may occur from an interaction between genes and exposure to certain chemicals such as pesticides, fertilizers, and fungicides.<sup>1</sup>
- Many types of cancer may not be inherited, but may be linked to environmental factors, including tobacco smoke, chemicals, dietary habits and viral infections.
- The National Toxicology Program recently listed 228 chemicals as known or reasonably anticipated human carcinogens.<sup>1</sup>

### Exposure to environmental risks varies based on race and ethnicity.

Minorities are at greater risk of exposure to synthetic chemicals.<sup>2</sup>

- **African-Americans.** African-Americans are much more likely to be exposed to dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls and to be exposed at higher levels.<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1990s, high lead blood levels were found in 4.4 percent of all U.S. children and in 22 percent of African-American children.<sup>6</sup>
- **Mexican Americans.** Mexican Americans are much more likely to be exposed to pesticides, herbicides, and pest repellants and to be exposed at higher levels.<sup>2</sup>
- **Whites.** Whites are much more likely to be exposed to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and phytoestrogens.<sup>2</sup>

### Exposure to environmental risks varies based on income.

People in low-income communities often have less healthy surroundings than people in other communities.<sup>3</sup>

- Low-income communities are often located in or near polluting industrial areas and have cheap, older housing where lead paint and pests are a threat.<sup>3</sup>
- A greater proportion of poor communities live in polluted environments and work in hazardous conditions and occupations.<sup>6</sup>
- Low-income communities receive less treatment for environmental disease because healthcare resources are limited.<sup>3</sup>
- In the mid-1990s, high lead blood levels were found in 4.4 percent of all U.S. children and 16 percent of children from low-income families.<sup>6</sup>
- Almost 300,000 farm workers suffer pesticide-related illnesses each year.<sup>6</sup>

### Exposure to environmental risks varies based on geography.

- **Living near water.** Native American children eat large amounts of fish that may be contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls, mercury, lead, and fluoride.<sup>4</sup>
- **Living in urban areas.** African-American women who live in the South Bronx are exposed to auto exhaust and tend to have smaller babies with smaller head circumferences.<sup>6</sup> In Central Harlem, 25 percent of the children have asthma, which has been linked to high exposure to diesel exhaust. Northern Manhattan has a third of the nation's largest diesel bus fleet and the city's highest concentration of diesel bus depots.<sup>6</sup>

1. [http://www.breastcancerfund.org/calbbc/fs\\_biomonitoring.htm](http://www.breastcancerfund.org/calbbc/fs_biomonitoring.htm)
2. <http://www.ejhu.org/eerdexecsum.htm>
3. <http://www.ejhu.org/disparities.html>
4. <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/oc/factsheets/disparity/child.htm>
5. <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/oc/factsheets/disparity/lead.htm>
6. "Building Healthy Environments to Eliminate Health Disparities Symposium," United States Environmental Protection Agency, May 28-29, 2003, Washington, D.C.

