

More than half of people with asthma aren't seeing a specialist

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Among Americans with severe asthma, less than half see a specialist to

manage their condition, new research shows.

The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute recommends patients with [severe asthma](#) be referred to a specialist for evaluation and care.

To find out how many people with severe [asthma](#) see a specialist, researchers examined insurance data from more than 54,000 patients who were 6 years of age and older.

Only 38% saw an allergist/immunologist or a pulmonologist at least once in the year before or after the first observation of severe asthma, the investigators found.

"Specialist care is important for managing any condition, especially a chronic one such as severe asthma," said lead author Dr. Jessica Most, a pulmonologist at Jefferson Health/National Jewish Health, in Philadelphia.

An analysis of a smaller group of nearly 6,000 patients showed that controller medication fills and prescriptions for biologic medications were higher for those seeing a specialist.

After a specialist visit, asthma attacks were much lower (about 38% versus 49%). Hospitalizations, emergency department visits and use of rescue inhalers also were lower for patients during the 12 months after their first visit to a specialist, the study found.

The greatest predictors for a specialist visit were higher numbers of asthma attacks, younger age, and having severe asthma identified in a recent year.

Patients with other non-respiratory health conditions, those 65 and older, and males were less likely to seek [specialist care](#), according to the report

published online June 17 in *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice*.

"Our findings suggest that specialist visits for severe asthma are very underutilized, with only four in 10 patients seeking care over a 2-year period," Most said in a journal news release.

She added that efforts should be made to increase specialist referrals, especially for [patients](#) who are less likely to seek out care from an allergist/immunologist or pulmonologist.

More information: The American Lung Association has more on [asthma](#).

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