

Asthma costs the US economy more than \$80 billion per year

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Asthma costs top \$80 billion per year, according to CDC study. Credit: ATS

Asthma costs the U.S. economy more than \$80 billion annually in medical expenses, missed work and school days and deaths, according to new research published online in the *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*.

In "The Economic Burden of Asthma in the United States, 2008-2013," researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, the most comprehensive source of data on health care use, expenditures, payment source and [health insurance coverage](#) in the U.S.

"The cost of asthma is one of the most important measures of the burden of the disease," said Tursynbek Nurmagambetov, PhD, lead study author and health economist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Cost studies can influence health policy decisions and help decision makers understand the scale, seriousness and implications of asthma, so that resources can be identified to improve disease management and reduce the burden of asthma."

Of 213,994 respondents to the survey over a six-year period, the study identified 10,237 people with treated asthma. The researchers defined treated asthma as having at least one medical encounter for asthma or having a prescription for at least one asthma medicine filled during a calendar year. Based on the pooled sample, researchers estimated average annual numbers and [costs](#) for the U.S. population.

Based on the 2008-2013 pooled sample, the study estimated (all costs are expressed in 2015 U.S. dollars):

- About 15.4 million people in the U.S. had treated asthma each year.
- The total annual cost of asthma in the U.S., including medical care, absenteeism and mortality, was \$81.9 billion.
- The annual per-person medical cost of asthma was \$3,266. Of that, \$1,830 was for prescriptions, \$640 for office visits, \$529 for hospitalizations, \$176 for hospital outpatient visits and \$105 for emergency room care.
- Asthma-related mortality cost \$29 billion per year, representing on average 3,168 deaths.
- Missed work and school days combined cost \$3 billion per year, representing 8.7 million workdays and 5.2 million school days lost due to asthma.
- People with no health insurance had significantly lower per person total medical expenditure for asthma compared to insured people.

According to the authors, the study likely underestimated the total cost of asthma to the U.S. economy because their analysis did not include people whose asthma went untreated. The study also did not include nonmedical costs associated with asthma, including transportation expenses, time lost waiting for appointments and diminished productivity while functioning at work or school with

asthma.

"The findings of the paper highlight the critical need to support and further strengthen asthma control strategies," Dr. Nurmagambetov said. "CDC's National Asthma Control Program was founded in 1999 to help reduce the burden of asthma in the United States. In order to reduce asthma-related ER visits, hospitalizations, absenteeism and mortality, we need to support guidelines-based care, expand self-management education and reduce environmental [asthma](#) triggers at homes."

Provided by American Thoracic Society

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