ASTHMA is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the airways and lungs, and causes recurring periods of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and coughing. While it is not known why women have a higher burden of asthma morbidity and mortality than men, researchers suggest that asthma symptoms can be affected by pregnancy, the menstrual cycle and menopause. In 2011, 12.8%, or nearly 424,000 women in Indiana, currently had asthma. The prevalence of current asthma among adult women in Indiana is double that of men [Fig 1].

From 2007 to 2011, the age-adjusted rates of emergency department (ED) visits for females were significantly higher than the rates for males [Fig 2]. In 2011, the age-adjusted rate for primary diagnosis emergency department visits was 52.4 females per 10,000 population compared to 40.9 males per 10,000.

Asthma and Pregnancy
Asthma is a common medical condition that potentially complicates pregnancy.
- During pregnancy, asthma symptoms worsen in 35% of women.
- In Indiana, an estimated 11.6% of pregnant women have a current asthma diagnosis.

Perinatal Outcomes
Well-controlled asthma during pregnancy is important for the health and well-being of mother and baby.
- Pregnant women with moderate to severe asthma that is not well controlled are at increased risk of adverse perinatal outcomes:
  - Low birthweight
  - Small for gestational age
  - Preterm labor and delivery
  - Pre-eclampsia

Medications
- According to current guidelines, it is safer for pregnant women with asthma to take their asthma medications than it is for them to have asthma symptoms or exacerbations.
- Medications are not tested on pregnant women; therefore, data on asthma medication use during pregnancy are lacking.
- A population-based study with 9,642 babies found that asthma medication use during pregnancy did not increase the risk for most birth defects.

For additional information on the impact of asthma in Indiana, please visit: www.asthma.in.gov
Asthma and Female Hormones

Hormones change during the course of the menstrual cycle, which can affect asthma symptoms.

Some women with asthma see an increase in asthma symptoms around the time their period starts, or before the onset of menstruation.

During menopause, hormones are fluctuating, which can increase asthma symptoms.

Obesity

In Indiana, 60.5% of adult females are considered overweight or obese. Of these females, 15.0% have a current asthma diagnosis—which is higher than the overall female prevalence of asthma in Indiana (12.8%).

Research studies suggest that obesity is associated with increased risk of asthma in women, but not in men.

References


TAKE ACTION: Steps you can take to control asthma and prevent asthma symptoms

- To find out how well controlled your asthma is, take the Asthma Control Test:
  - Test for those 12 and over
  - Test for children ages 4 to 11
- Identify and avoid asthma triggers that can cause symptoms or attacks.
- During routine medical visits, talk with your healthcare provider about your asthma symptoms, triggers, medications and side effects.
- Work with your healthcare provider to create an Asthma Action Plan—these plans include a list of triggers, how to avoid them, information on medications and when they should be taken.
- Track asthma symptoms during your menstrual cycle to determine if/when symptoms increase.
- Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke.
- If you are pregnant:
  - Continue taking maintenance medications as directed by your health care provider.
  - Monitor lung function with spirometry at prenatal visits.

Community resources

- NeedyMeds is an information resource that locates assistance programs to help people afford their medications.
- To be connected with Indiana programs and resources call the Indiana Family Helpline at 1-855-Help-1ST (855-435-7178). For information on tobacco cessation, call the Indiana Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- For resources and programs concerning women’s health, visit the Indiana Office of Women’s Health.
- The IU National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health is working to improve the health of Indiana women.
- The Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence provides victims and their families with support, information and referrals. The statewide 24-hour toll free hotline number is 1-800-332-7385.
- The Indiana Coalition Against Sexual Assault provides education, advocacy, and support to professionals, communities and survivors regarding sexual violence in Indiana. To reach your local rape crisis center directly, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.