

# Lack of health insurance linked to fewer asthma diagnoses in children

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Providing health insurance to more children could lead to diagnosing additional cases of mild or intermittent asthma, a new study shows. Some who treat childhood asthma say this could increase the number of kids receiving medication to control their asthma symptoms and seeking care for asthma flares.

A study published in the journal *Health Services Research* examined the relationship between [insurance coverage](#) and the likelihood of asthma diagnosis. The researchers found insured children with intermittent asthma are four times more likely to have an asthma diagnosis to receive a prescription for inhaled medication.

Children with more persistent asthma symptoms seemed to obtain a diagnosis regardless of [insurance status](#), said lead author Tumaini Coker, MD, assistant professor at the University of California at Los Angeles' Mattel Children's Hospital.

"[Health insurance](#) may lead to diagnosis for children with milder symptoms of asthma, who otherwise may not be diagnosed because they don't present to emergency departments and

doctor offices for asthma [flares](#) as often as children with more severe symptoms," Coker said.

However, insured children with a diagnosis of intermittent asthma were also more likely to make visits to the emergency room or doctor's office than children without insurance, despite taking medication. Coker's team suggested that this may be due to parents' increased sensitivity to [asthma symptoms](#) following a diagnosis.

"We need other studies that look at the long-term benefits and costs of detecting and treating previously undiagnosed children who have intermittent asthma" before understanding the widespread benefit to consumers, Coker said of wider health coverage.

Despite potential costs, Michael Cabana, MD, professor of pediatrics at the University of California at San Francisco believes finding more cases of persistent and intermittent asthma will improve kids' quality of life.

"If we insure more kids, we may uncover this unmet need of folks that haven't been diagnosed with asthma or who aren't achieving optimal care," he said.

**More information:** Coker, T., et al. The association of health insurance and disease impairment with reported asthma prevalence in U.S. children. *Health Serv Res* online, 2011.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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