

Costs of Environmental Health Conditions in California Children Executive Summary



Most Californians are living longer and more productive lives than ever. Improved environmental conditions, such as the provision of clean water and air, improvements in sanitation, and safe housing, have contributed greatly to healthier lives. However, many thousands of California's children still suffer from preventable environmental health conditions, most notably children living in low-income communities and communities of color. In addition to significant suffering, stress, and financial strain felt by affected families, these conditions have a considerable economic impact on California. To date, there have been little data to measure these impacts.

This report provides data on the health burden of selected environmentally-related conditions among children, describes the costs associated with these conditions, and attempts to identify what proportion of disease burden is potentially preventable through public health interventions. It shows that reducing preventable exposures to environmental hazards could save over \$254 million annually in costs related to childhood conditions and save \$13 billion over the lifetime of all children born in a single year in California. Reducing environmental hazards could alleviate asthma symptoms requiring medical attention in 280,000 children, prevent 120 cases of cancer, and avert the development of over 1,800 neurobehavioral disorders each year. Conditions related to lead exposures result in the greatest cost. The prevention of lead exposures could save \$8–11 billion in lifetime costs for all children born in a single year in California, as well as prevent a lifetime of healthcare treatment and educational challenges for affected children.

Data on the human and economic burden of disease can inform better decision-making; currently, such information is not always available or taken into account when considering the cost of environmental remediation. Past studies have estimated that,

nationally, health conditions related to environmental exposures have lifetime costs of over \$76 billion. However, few state-level estimates have been produced, and data on the costs of environmentally-related conditions in California are limited.

Better cost and disease prevalence data are needed to untangle the complex relationships between the environment and health, and to inform future research and promote strategies to reduce environmental exposures. Many suspected environmental hazards remain understudied, and new potential hazards emerge everyday. Data for many health outcomes and costs are not maintained in a central registry. Improved tracking of environmental hazards, illnesses, and disease costs would assist future research and decision-making activities.

The reduction of preventable environmental hazards in California could save...

\$254 million annually

\$10–13 billion over the lifetime of all children born within a single year

And each year prevent or alleviate...

Asthma in 280,000 children

120 new cases of pediatric cancer

The development of neurobehavioral disorders in 1,800 children