



NEWS

Asthma deaths rise 33% in past decade in England and Wales

Gareth Iacobucci

The BMJ

Deaths from asthma in England and Wales have increased by a third in the past decade, a new analysis has shown.

The analysis of official figures from the Office for National Statistics, released by the charity Asthma UK on 9 August, shows that more than 1400 adults and children died from asthma attacks in 2018, an 8% increase since 2017.

Overall, more than 12 700 people have died from asthma in England and Wales in the past decade. Deaths increased by 33% during 2008-18.

The charity emphasised the need for improvement in basic areas of care, such as checking inhaler technique and regular reviews with a GP or asthma nurse.

Kay Boycott, chief executive of Asthma UK, said, "It is completely unacceptable that thousands of people with asthma in England and Wales have died needlessly from asthma attacks. "The same mistakes are being made again and again because essential recommendations have not been implemented. This lack of action is costing lives and devastating families and communities."

Asthma action plans

The charity highlighted the lack of progress since the National Review of Asthma Deaths, commissioned by the NHS and Department of Health five years ago, which found that two thirds of asthma deaths could have been prevented by better basic care. It noted that, of the review's 19 recommendations, only one had been—partially—implemented.

Last month new guidelines from the British Thoracic Society and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network said that all patients with asthma should have their risk of a future attack

assessed and have their monitoring, treatment, and care tailored accordingly.¹

Boycott added, "The NHS must act now to ensure that everyone with asthma in England and Wales gets basic asthma care which includes a yearly review with their GP or asthma nurse, a check to ensure they are using their inhaler properly, and a written asthma action plan. The NHS needs to ensure that all healthcare professionals are providing this care to patients."

Helen Stokes-Lampard, chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said that the figures were "deeply concerning" and called for more resources to help practice teams reverse the trend.

"Addressing this should be a priority for the government and the NHS," she said. "Asthma is a common condition in general practice, and GPs and their nursing teams understand the importance of carefully managing patients with asthma, including through the use of personal asthma action plans, as well as encouraging patients to undergo regular reviews.

"It is also vitally important that patients understand their own treatment and how to properly use equipment, such as inhalers, peak flow meters, and spacer devices—and GPs and our teams play an important role in ensuring patients of all ages feel more confident about managing their asthma appropriately and effectively.

"Ultimately, we need more GPs and more members of the practice team so that we can spend longer with our patients with asthma."

1 Mahase E. Asthma: assess all patients for future attack risk and tailor care accordingly, new guideline advises. *BMJ* 2019;366:l4846. 10.1136/bmj.l4846 31340925

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>