

Helping Children, and Their Parents, Breathe Easier

Sometimes, what a person really needs to succeed is a lot of encouragement and a little guidance. Just ask Mary.

Nine years ago, the Dickenson County resident was expecting her first child, something that doctors previously had told her would never happen. Underweight and unsure about proper prenatal nutrition, Mary was labeled a high-risk pregnancy and referred to an organization that could help her.

That's when Mary met her CHIP home visitor, the woman who would not only help her have a healthy pregnancy, but, ultimately, a healthier environment in which to raise her family. CHIP of Southwest Virginia is part of the nonprofit CHIP of Virginia, a statewide network that works to help families keep their young children healthy.

"Once or twice a month during her pregnancy, I would visit Mary at her home with a nurse," her CHIP worker says. "We would work on nutrition and what to expect after the baby came. I was basically just assuring her that she could do it."

CHIP continued that assurance after Mary's baby, Christian, was born, guiding her through the new experiences of parenthood, including how to properly mix the baby's bottles.

Then, when Christian was just 9 months old, he began having chronic problems with his sinuses and allergies. At the age of 4, he had to have his tonsils – "the biggest (the doctor) had ever seen," Mary remembers – removed, and, later, tubes put into his ears to alleviate sinus drainage, a condition that was causing the young boy to lose his hearing.

Soon after came the frightening attacks of asthma, a chronic respiratory illness, that often sent mother and child to the emergency room for treatment. Mary's second child, Corey, was born in 2000 and also suffered from asthma. Again, CHIP stepped in, helping Mary pinpoint the things in her home that were aggravating her sons' illnesses.

Together, Mary and her CHIP worker began the long process of eliminating those environmental triggers: stopping water leaks, replacing rotted,

hardwood floors, removing old carpeting and installing ceiling fans to improve air circulation. CHIP also provided Mary with an air purifier.

At CHIP's suggestion, Mary also joined CHIP's asthma management program, attending monthly support meetings where she learned more about allergens and talked with other parents facing similar situations.

The changes have made a big difference, Mary says, noting the boys' asthma is now under control. And, with her home visitor's encouragement, Mary is working toward other goals as well, including a career as a teacher and building a house.

She's come a long way. And Mary serves as an inspiration to other parents who think, "If she can do it, then so can I."



ASTHMA FACTS:

- Asthma accounts for 1 in 6 Pediatric ER visits.
- Asthma rates in children under 5 have increased more than 160% since 1994.
- 50%-80% of children with asthma experience their first symptoms before age 5.
- Children with asthma have 3.5 times as many hospital visits, 3.1 times as many prescriptions, and 1.9 times as many physician office visits.
- In an average month, 55% of children with asthma missed at least 1 day of child care, school or work, and 48% of parents missed at least 1 day of school or work because of the child's asthma.





Conquering Asthma at Home

It's the middle of the night. Your three year old daughter is gasping desperately, unable to fill her lungs with air. It's the second time in two weeks that you've had to make a trip to the emergency room in the middle of the night. Without adequate health insurance, you aren't sure how you're going to pay the ever increasing hospital bills, but know that you must get your child the help she needs. Once again, you will be up all night, unsure if you will make it to work tomorrow. Sitting at her bedside in the ER, you feel

helpless, not knowing how to prevent or control your child's frequent asthma attacks.

In Virginia, there are an estimated 119,700 children 18 years and under living with asthma. Children aged 0-4 years have the highest rate of asthma hospitalization: 47.1 per 10,000. These statistics illustrate a serious strain on the health-care delivery systems in communities across Virginia. While asthma is a disease that can be managed well in a primary care setting, these statistics show that too many parents with asth-

matic children turn to emergency rooms and hospitals for the management of their child's disease. But, with a little guidance, low-income families can learn to manage their children's asthma more effectively, reducing the strain not only for the child and family but for the health-care system as well.

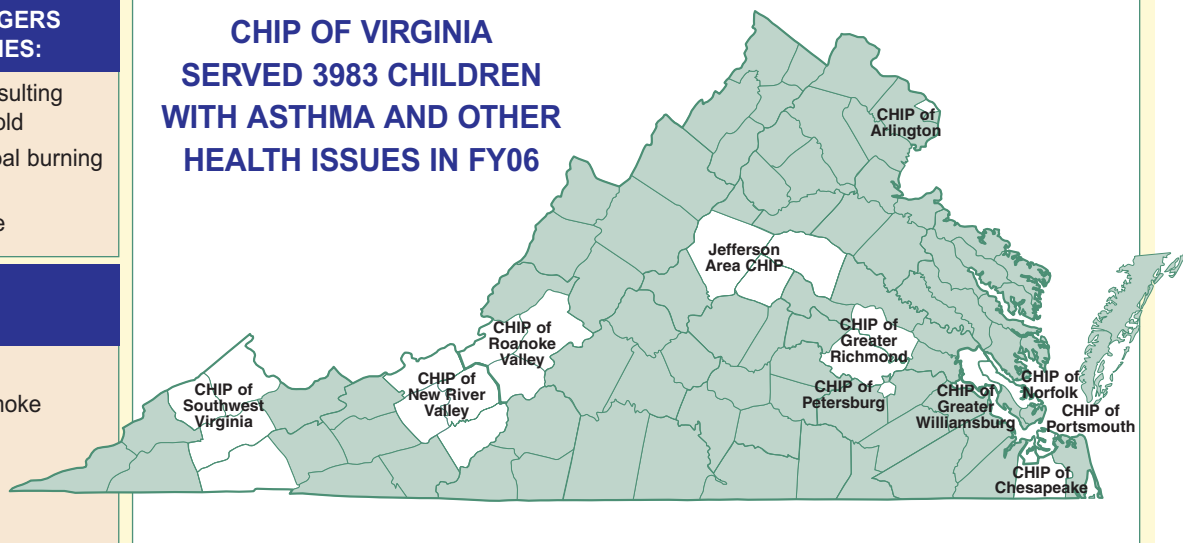
AVOIDABLE ASTHMA TRIGGERS FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES:

- Substandard housing and the resulting cockroaches, dust mites, and mold
- Use of kerosene and wood or coal burning sources of heat
- Exposure to second-hand smoke

RISK FACTORS FOR CHILDHOOD ASTHMA:

- Low birth weight
- Perinatal exposure to tobacco smoke
- Allergies
- Viral Respiratory Infections
- Family History

CHIP OF VIRGINIA SERVED 3983 CHILDREN WITH ASTHMA AND OTHER HEALTH ISSUES IN FY06



CHIP OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S ASTHMA CONTROL TODAY (ACT) PROJECT:

PROJECT FEATURES

- Use of American Lung Association curriculum Open Airways
- Smoking cessation/reduction education for parents of asthmatic children
- Asthma focused parent groups and children's asthma adventure camps

OUTCOMES

- 100% of parents reported a greater degree of comfort communicating with their child's doctor about their child's symptoms and treatment
- 41% of parents quit smoking in their home/vehicle (annual average)

Asthma-related medical care was reduced:

- Doctor's visits reduced by 62%
- Emergency room visits reduced by 51%
- Hospitalizations reduced by 42%

CHIP OF GREATER RICHMOND'S BREATHE EASY PROJECT

PROJECT FEATURES

- Works with family and primary physician to develop an asthma action plan
- Assists families in identifying and responding to the child's asthma triggers
- Helps children participate fully in school and physical activities

OUTCOMES

- 25% of CHIP children were diagnosed as asthmatic
- Decrease of over 85% in emergency room usage among enrolled families

