

825 Helena Avenue
Helena, MT 59601-3459
Phone: 406-442-6556
Toll Free: 800-LUNG-USA
Fax: 406-442-2346
E-Mail: ala-nr@ala-nr.org

National Web Site: www.lungusa.org

TESTIMONY
House Bill No. 396

DATE 1-28-05
HB 396

**AMERICAN
LUNG
ASSOCIATION®**

of the Northern Rockies
Serving Montana and Wyoming

By: Dick Paulsen,
Executive Director

Date: January 28, 2005

House Education Committee

Chairman Hedges (Don Hedges) and members of the Committee, I am Dick Paulsen with the American Lung Association of the Northern Rockies.

The motto of the American Lung Association is: "When You Can't Breathe, Nothing Else Matters."

On behalf of the 28,000 children with asthma in Montana and their families, we rise in support of this life-saving legislation that keeps these kids in school and out of the hospital, keeps parents at work, and provides liability protection for school staff.

Although the American Lung Association has many programs to help kids with asthma, the reality is that these kids are at constant risk of an attack that can come from a change in the weather, exposure to a plant or animal or mold, fumes from a chemical spill, fresh paint, carpet cleaner, automobile or bus fumes. Second-hand smoke is both a major cause in both causing asthma and triggering asthma episodes (*Reference Comprehensive Tobacco Use Prevention Program*). Life really can change for these kids very quickly.

As asthma is not a reportable condition in Montana, we rely on a variety of sources to determine exactly how bad the problem is in our state. We'd like to think that because we live out West, that provides some measure of protection. Unfortunately, that isn't the case. For Montana children, as with other children in the U.S., asthma is the most common chronic disease among children.

A published study done by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services looked at Native American children in Northeast Montana on the Fort Peck Reservation. That study determined that those children have a 2.5 higher rate of asthma than the national average, and one of the highest reported in any minority group in the nation. I know there are special efforts being made to help our Indian kids related to education. For those with asthma, this will help.

For the school staff, they too can be unnecessarily put in the position of responding to a life-threatening emergency.

**When You Can't
Breathe,
Nothing Else
Matters®**

Founded in 1904, the
American Lung Association
includes affiliated associations
throughout the U.S.

Asthma rates higher than expected in Native American children

Native American children in northeast Montana have 2.5 times the national average rate of pediatric asthma, and one of the highest reported for any minority group in the nation, according to a study published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Roman Hendrickson, clinical assistant professor, is lead author on "High Frequency of Asthma in Native American Children among the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Northeast Montana," in the DHHS' Feb. 2003 issue of Indian Health Service (IHS) Primary Care Provider. The prevalence rates of the general population of children in the United States is approximately 6.7 percent; however, some U.S. minority groups report rates as high as 20 percent. The Montana Medicaid Program reported a 2.3 percent prevalence for children enrolled in the program who were receiving asthma-related services in 1997-1998.

Hendrickson published the paper with James Bresette and Julie Bemer, both of the Fort Peck Indian Health Service Unit, Poplar, Mont. The Fort Peck facility serves more than 8,500 Native Americans. The authors recommend further studies of asthma risk factors, diagnosis, and treatment for Native American populations.

The IHS Primary Care Provider is a monthly publication distributed to 8,000 health-care providers who serve American Indians and Alaska Natives.