EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT UTILIZATION

In 2010, 22.0 percent of children had at least one visit to a hospital emergency department (ED) in the past year and 8.4 percent had multiple visits. Children younger than 5 years of age were more likely to have had a past-year ED visit (28.1 percent) than children aged 5–11 years or 12–17 years (20.4 percent and 19.0 percent, respectively; data not shown).

Emergency department utilization also varies by poverty and race and ethnicity. In 2010, almost one-third of children living in households with incomes below the poverty level had visited an ED in the past year (30.2 percent), compared to 17.3 percent of children living in households at 200 percent or more of the poverty level. Children in poverty were more than twice as likely to have had multiple ED visits as non-poor children living at 200 percent or more of poverty (13.2 versus 5.6 percent, respectively). With respect to race and ethnicity, non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children were most likely to have visited an ED (26.9 and 23.1 percent, respectively) while Asian children were least likely to have done so (14.9 percent). Compared to the overall average, Asian children had a similar proportion of multiple ED visits but a lower proportion of single visits, whereas non-Hispanic Black children had a higher proportion of both single and multiple visits.

According to the 2009 National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the most common reason for a visit to the emergency department among children under 15 years of age was fever (19.7 percent of visits), followed by cough (7.6 percent), and vomiting (4.5 percent). The three most common primary diagnoses treated in ED visits among both males and females were acute upper respiratory infections (10.8 percent, combined), fever of unknown origin (6.6 percent, combined), and otitis media (middle ear infection) and Eustachian tube disorders (5.1 percent, combined), followed by unspecified viral and chlamydial infection for females (3.2 percent) and open wound of head (4.1 percent) for males. Asthma ranked as the seventh most common diagnosis for males (3.4 percent) compared to the thirteenth most common diagnosis for females (1.9 percent, data not shown).

Visits to the Emergency Department in the Past Year Among Children Under Age 18,* by Poverty Status,** 2010
Source (III.7): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey

Visits to the Emergency Department in the Past Year Among Children Under Age 18,* by Race/Ethnicity,** 2010
Source (III.7): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey

*All estimates are age-adjusted. **Poverty level, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, was $22,314 for a family of four in 2010.

*All estimates are age-adjusted. **The sample of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander children was too small to produce reliable results.