



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON
BRONX HEALTH MATTERS
 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION NEWSLETTER

2023 Issue 1

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CLEARING THE AIR
COMBATING AIR POLLUTION AND ASTHMA

Written by Rubashruti Kanna | Edited by Mahnoor Jaura



A graffiti painting that depicts child asthma in the South Bronx.

Ashley Avila was born and raised in the South Bronx. “[I] had a pretty normal childhood: walks to school in the morning with my dad, playdates with friends, and trips to the park,” she wrote in a letter to Bronx Borough President Gibson.

“Except the nearest park was a 20-minute walk away and almost every 8-year-old there had to clutch their asthma pump in their fist as they ran to play with friends.”

Ashley’s story is still a reality for many Bronx children today. The Bronx has some of the most asthma-ridden neighborhoods in the country. Almost 25% of children in The Bronx are diagnosed with asthma. Mott Haven and Hunts Point have the highest child asthma hospitalizations

citywide. Even though asthma hospitalizations have been decreasing in every other borough, child asthma rates have remained the same in The Bronx. Asthma-related emergency room visits for children ages 5 to 17 actually increased by 15.6% from 2006 to 2016.

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Asthma is a chronic condition in which the respiratory airways in the body narrow and swell, sometimes producing extra mucus. This condition makes breathing difficult and can cause coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.

The clinical presentation of asthma can vary from very minor symptoms to severe attacks. Asthma symptoms can be triggered by airborne allergens such as pollen and mold spores, respiratory infections, physical activity, cockroach particles, pet dander, cold air, air pollutants including tobacco smoke, and strong emotions and stress. Asthma is associated with higher incidence of heart attacks, strokes, and respiratory diseases.

Asthma Alley

The high asthma rates in the South Bronx have led to the area being nicknamed “Asthma Alley.” Mott Haven has five times more asthma hospitalizations than the national average and 21 times more hospitalizations than other New York City neighborhoods. Even worse, the asthma-related death rate is 43 deaths per one million residents in The Bronx, more than four times the rate for New York State.

Asthma cannot be cured, so children with asthma continue suffering with the condition into adulthood. In the South Bronx alone, an average of 11-13% of adults live with asthma, peaking at 17% in some neighborhoods. This is much higher than the 10% of adults across New York City living with asthma, and the national asthma prevalence of 7.5%.

Highways Harming Health

The Bronx’s devastating asthma rates are partially attributable to high pollution rates, primarily caused by vehicle emissions. Vehicles using fossil fuels release carbon

Mott Haven’s asthma hospitalization rate is 5 times the national average and 21 times other NYC neighborhood averages.

dioxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and nitrous oxides. In the summer, increased ultraviolet radiation combines with VOCs and nitrous oxides to produce ground level ozone. This ozone is toxic to humans at high concentrations, putting individuals with asthma at great risk of increased health complications and mortality. Moreover, particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers (PM2.5) emitted by vehicles can be inhaled, causing asthma, other respiratory issues, and potentially cancer in the long-term.

The South Bronx is wedged between the Major Deegan, Bruckner, and Cross Bronx Expressways, three major highways with constant traffic and massive pollutant emissions. This area is also home to many parks and public schools, leaving children and families vulnerable to high levels of air pollution daily. A 2021 article by researchers at Manhattan College described how air conditions in the South Bronx continue to deteriorate due to thousands of diesel trucks driving through the area to get to the Hunts Point markets, the wastewater treatment plants, and grocery warehouses in Mott Haven.

The opening of warehouses and newspaper printing presses in the borough has only increased vehicular pollution, with hundreds of trucks traveling to and from these locations throughout The Bronx.

A Perfect Storm: Pollution, Racism, and Poverty

Environmental and neighborhood inequities intersect with racial and housing disparities, which are arguably the two biggest issues underlying to high asthma rates. In The Bronx, 43.8% of the population is Black, and 56.4% are Hispanic. 97% of the Mott Haven population is Black or Hispanic. A 2019 study by Clark University found that “non-Hispanic whites experience... ~17% less air pollution exposure than is caused by their consumption. Blacks and Hispanics average 56% and 63% excess exposure, respectively, relative to the exposure caused by their consumption.” Black people are also three times more likely to die from asthma-related causes than white individuals, revealing the high risk of mortality for Bronx residents.

These racial disparities can be attributed to lack of access to care and generational disinvestment in communities of color, especially in economic and housing development. About 1 in every 4 people in The Bronx lives in poverty. Many live in poor housing conditions, across private and public housing, which increases the risk of asthma. The Bronx has the highest proportion of homes with mold and pests, according to New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Data,

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HIGHWAYS HARMING HEALTH



As part of the NYC Sheridan - Hunts Point Land Use and Transportation Study, NYCEDC and NYCDOT performed a survey of drivers at the three wholesale food markets (produce, meat, and fish) at the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center (FDC) in 2011 to find out the percentage of delivery trucks traveling on each highway. Hundreds of trucks travel to and from the FDC every week. The analysis of these traffic patterns provided a proxy for understanding the larger transportation patterns of trucks traveling to and from the food-related businesses in the FDC.

The study found that a significant portion of drivers travel primarily on the Bruckner, Deegan, and Cross Bronx expressways, in both inbound (left) and outbound (right) traffic, surrounding The Bronx in polluted air. Others take local routes, which would directly increase pollution in residential areas. Since the study, these congested traffic patterns have not significantly changed.

in addition to the highest percentage of second-hand smoking. Bronx neighborhoods also rank among the highest in prevalence of homes with maintenance problems, including cracks and holes, mice or rats, cockroaches, or mold. These neighborhoods are also the ones with the highest rates of pediatric asthma-related emergency room visits.

Individuals with asthma in high poverty neighborhoods are also often uninsured and are unlikely to receive primary and preventative care, allowing their asthma to grow worse. Without proper management, many people with asthma repeatedly end up in the

emergency room with critical asthmatic episodes or other related complications. The lack of continuity of care causes life-threatening situations and exacerbates physical and emotional stress. The perfect storm of pollution, systemic racism, and poverty feeds directly into these poor health outcomes, leaving Bronxites to face the consequences.

Taking Action

Cap the Cross Bronx

The first step to prevent asthma in The Bronx is to reduce air pollution. Limiting the amount of air

pollution from the major highways that reach Bronx communities will significantly improve air quality and will reduce new asthma cases.

Most important to this conversation is the Cross Bronx Expressway. Constructed between 1948 and 1972, the Cross Bronx stretches across the borough as part of I-95 and has some of the highest rates of traffic and collisions in the country. Adjacent neighborhoods also have some of the worst health outcomes in the country, many linked to the highway's noise and pollution.

Since taking office, Borough President Gibson has strongly advocated to "Cap the Cross Bronx," which would entail decking

“For far too long, the Bronx has suffered under harsh environmental policies that have resulted in our residents experiencing some of the worst health outcomes across the country. The Cross-Bronx Expressway divided communities to make way for a roadway that has contributed to poor health outcomes for many of our residents and families in adjacent neighborhoods as well as a surge in noise and air pollution in our borough.

I am excited by [the study’s] announcement to undo the wrongs of the past by getting community input on how we reimagine the Cross-Bronx Expressway with an emphasis on equity and restorative justice, and I look forward to seeing the results of this very important study.”

- Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson

the highway’s below-ground sections. Capping reduces pollution by filtering exhaust before releasing it into the air. The covered areas would allow new parks and community spaces to be built on top, adding green and recreational spaces for families to enjoy.

In December of 2022, Borough President Gibson attended and supported a press conference in which Mayor Eric Adams and Congressman Ritchie Torres announced the start of the Reimagining the Cross Bronx Expressway study. Funded by a \$2 million federal grant, the 2-year study will engage community groups to reimagine the expressway and neighborhoods along the Cross Bronx corridor from the Harlem River to the Hutchinson River Parkway. The first round of community meetings is planned to begin in February 2023.

Numerous agencies and community partners have committed to collaborating on the study, including the NYC Departments of Transportation, City Planning, and Health and Mental Hygiene and the New York State Department of Transportation. The study’s researchers will ultimately release a multi-year plan that includes both near and long-term project proposals to improve neighborhood

conditions around the Cross Bronx.

EV Trucks

BP Gibson also supports the conversion of delivery trucks to electric vehicles to control the air pollution emitted by these vehicles in Bronx neighborhoods, especially in Hunts Point, home to the largest food distribution center in New York City. Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, these electric vehicle conversions are more possible than ever before. The MTA has already committed to converting the bus fleet to all-electric by 2040. As this rolls out, The Bronx must have priority for these buses due to the borough’s status as an environmental justice area.

Bronx neighborhoods have long faced significant environmental harms and so should have the first opportunity to benefit from these mitigation efforts. A Columbia University study found that if even 5 percent of outbound traffic made up of medium- and heavy-duty trucks, approximately 600 of 12,000 vehicles, were converted to electric vehicles, PM2.5 would decrease by 80 kilograms per year. This would also save \$300,000 in social costs and \$2.2 million in fuel, operation, and maintenance costs.

Housing

Beyond this, Borough President Gibson continues to advocate for

better housing conditions across public and private housing in The Bronx. She works closely with NYCHA to ensure that housing provide safe, clean, and healthy home environments for families. The Borough President’s Ombudsman Unit (previously called Constituent Services) is available to help Bronxites navigate any housing issues. If you have a housing issue and are seeking help, contact the Bronx Borough President’s Ombudsman Unit at (718) 590-3554.

Addressing Child Asthma

In addition to preventing new asthma cases, ensuring that people who currently live with asthma can access treatment and continuous care is equally important. Bronx residents are less likely than other New Yorkers to have primary care physicians or health insurance.

Moreover, there are fewer doctors per capita in The Bronx than in the other boroughs. Borough President Gibson has prioritized improving access for Bronx residents to treatment, especially asthma treatment for our children. One of the best ways to do this is through the schools. Borough President Gibson is advocating to develop more school-based health clinics to deliver on-site primary care, providing careful management and treatment for acute asthma cases that can keep children home from school or even land them in the hospital. Teachers must also be trained to deal with asthma emergencies and to anticipate how and when to administer inhalers or other protocols.

With these significant steps towards preventing and treating asthma, Borough President Gibson is striving to make The Bronx a healthier and cleaner borough for generations to come.

BP HEALTH EVENTS

WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS



CalLEN-LORDE FACILITY SITE VISIT

November 18 - Callen-Lorde
Bronx 3144 3rd Avenue



T.D. 11 BREAST CANCER & DV HEALTH FAIR

November 1 - River Avenue
and East 161st Street



HUNTS POINT HEALTH FAIR AND TURKEY GIVEAWAY

November 19 - Hunts Point Recreation Center 765 Manida Street



2022 WORLD AIDS DAY EVENT

December 1



VETERANS TURKEY GIVEAWAY AND FISHER HOUSE SITE VISIT

WITH THE JAMES J. PETERS VA MEDICAL CENTER

November 21



NY STATE NURSES ASSOCIATION STRIKE

January 10-11



LiveOnNY SITE VISIT ORGAN PROCUREMENT ORGANIZATION FOR TRANSPLANTS

January 17 - 30-30 47th Ave, 9th Floor, Queens



HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKSHOP HOSTED BY NOT ON MY WATCH

January 17



Stop & Shop Reopening

Thank you to the Stop & Shop School Food Pantry Program for donating \$10,000 to P.S. 5's in-school food pantry!

January 20 - 5716 Broadway



TACKLING THE TRIPLEDEMIC

COVID-19, FLU, AND RSV: HOW TO KEEP YOUR FAMILY HEALTHY

With cases of COVID-19, flu, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) rising, Borough President Gibson is committed to providing accurate information to all Bronxites about how to keep you and your loved ones safe this winter and to ensuring access to essential health services. Data shows that this year, flu cases in New York City are already higher than they were during the peak of the last four flu seasons, and over the past month, the seven-day average of confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 increased, as did cases of RSV. Bronx neighborhoods continue to have some of the highest COVID-19, flu, and RSV rates in the city.

The New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has strongly urged New Yorkers to stay safe by staying up to date with vaccinations, masking in indoor public settings when possible, testing regularly, and staying home if sick.

Understanding the Viruses

All three illnesses are caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract. All are contagious and can spread quickly through contact with respiratory droplets from an infected person who coughs or sneezes. And they lead to some

similar symptoms, including sore throat, cough, runny nose and fever, making it challenging to tell them apart.

Usually, all three illnesses cause mild symptoms, and most individuals recover on their own. However, some people are at higher risk for a more severe version of these illnesses, additional medical complications, or hospitalization, including premature infants and babies younger than six months old, people over 65, and people who have a weakened immune system, chronic lung disease, or certain congenital heart, neurological or neuromuscular conditions.

What is RSV?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common respiratory virus that often causes mild, cold-like symptoms but may result in severe

illness in some people. Symptoms begin 4-6 days after exposure and develop slowly over several days. People are usually contagious 10 days after symptoms begin. Most people recover in one to two weeks. For very young infants with RSV, symptoms may include irritability, decreased activity, decreased appetite and breathing difficulties. RSV infection can cause pneumonia, especially in the very young, the very old or those who have weakened immune systems. It is possible to get RSV again after recovering from an RSV infection. There is currently no vaccine to prevent RSV, but you and your loved ones can protect yourselves by following proven public health preventative measures such as washing your hands regularly, wearing masks, and social distancing.

The Flu and COVID-19

Most people are more familiar with the flu and COVID-19 than with RSV. These two conditions share many symptoms, but the one symptom unique to COVID-19 is a change in or loss of taste or smell.

Resources to Stay Healthy

COVID At-Home Tests

New York City officials are providing at-home rapid antigen tests for COVID-19 available at over 250 walk-up distribution locations in every borough,

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If you or your loved ones have these symptoms, call your doctor:

For COVID-19: Persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, difficulty waking up or staying awake, and blueish skin, lips, or nail beds

For the flu: Faintness, severe sore throat, or a cough with lots of mucus

For RSV: Blueish skin, lips, or nail beds, in addition to high fever and difficulty breathing

For all three illnesses: Persistent high fever or shortness of breath

If you do not have a health care provider, call 311 or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) to be connected to NYC Health + Hospitals. Care is available in NYC regardless of immigration status, insurance, or ability to pay. If it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the hospital.

including at city libraries, parks facilities, and cultural institutions, among other locations. New Yorkers can visit [NYC.gov/COVIDTest](https://www.nyc.gov/COVIDTest) to find the at-home test distribution location most convenient to them.

COVID-19 & Flu Tests/Treatment

COVID-19 testing with immediate access to Paxlovid anti-viral medication for eligible patients will be available at 75 mobile Test to Treat units across the city. Fifty mobile Test to Treat units now offer flu and RSV testing for symptomatic patients and prescriptions for Tamiflu for those found eligible. New Yorkers may present proof of a positive test – including at-home test results and test results from any external testing provider – at all mobile



Test to Treat units to be evaluated for and immediately connected to Paxlovid. New Yorkers can visit [NYC.gov/COVIDTest](https://www.nyc.gov/COVIDTest) to find the mobile Test to Treat unit most convenient to them.

Accessing Medical Care

Moreover, New Yorkers can call their doctor or 212-COVID19 to ask about treatment for COVID-19. Calling 212-COVID19 provides an immediate connection

to a clinician who can refer patients to treatments or prescribe antiviral medications and can arrange for free medication delivery.

Flu and RSV patients can also visit NYC Health + Hospitals' ExpressCare or call 631-EXP-CARE to talk to a provider who can provide high-quality urgent care and prescribe medications to the pharmacy of their choice.

DID YOU KNOW?

JANUARY IS NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION MONTH

What Is Human Trafficking?

The use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.

Traffickers might use the following methods to lure victims into trafficking situations:

- Violence • Manipulation • False promises of well-paying jobs • Romantic relationships

Red Flags for Trafficking:

- Reluctant to discuss how they make money, where they live, how or when they came to the U.S.
- Lacks control over schedule and/or money
- Is not in control of their own ID documents
- Works excessive hours
- Unpaid for work, or paid very little
- Lives with their employer or in a cramped space
- Appears to be under someone else's control or surveillance
- Exhibits submissive or fearful behavior
- Coached or rehearsed responses to questions
- Presence of relevant health issues (*STDs, HIV/AIDS, evidence of sexual abuse, mental health issues, visible or untreated injuries, suicidal ideation and/or depression*)

Who To Contact for Help:

If you believe the person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

Otherwise, please contact:

The National Human Trafficking Hotline
at 888-373-7888 or Text to 233733

NYPD Human Trafficking Hotline: 646-610-7272

If a child is trafficked and missing from home or a program:

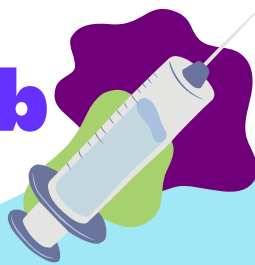
The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678), or use their **Cyber Tipline** at www.missingkids.com

If the suspected trafficker is a parent or person legally responsible for the child:

The NY Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment at: 1-800-342-3720

If you have reason to believe that a youth is being abused or neglected while placed in residential care, call The New York State Justice Center at 1-855-373-2122

The Vaccine Info Hub



A one-stop shop for must-know vaccination guidelines and resources

Updated as of December 14, 2022

Flu Seasonal Vaccine

What it does: Influenza (flu) vaccines protect against the four influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. Getting the flu vaccine can keep you from getting the flu and reduces severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

Who is eligible: Everyone 6 months and older in the United States should get a flu vaccine every season with rare exception.

How to get vaccinated: The 2022-2023 flu vaccine is available at most pharmacies, hospitals, and community health centers. Find a location near you at www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/.

COVID-19 Updated Booster

What it does: The new booster targets the Omicron subvariant BA.5, the currently dominant version of the virus. It helps restore protection that has waned since previous vaccination and will protect against severe illness from all COVID-19 strains.

Who is eligible: Updated COVID-19 vaccine boosters are now available for everyone 5 and older who received their most recent vaccine dose at least two months ago.

How to get boosted: The booster is available at pharmacies, local hospitals, and community health centers. Find a location near you at <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/>.

Monkeypox Vaccine

What it does: It prevents smallpox and monkeypox prior to infection. There are two doses given 4 weeks apart.

Who is eligible: 1) People of any sexual orientation or gender identity who have or may have multiple or anonymous sex partners; 2) People of any sexual orientation or gender identity whose sex partners are eligible per the criteria above; 3) People who know or suspect they have been exposed to MPV in the last 14 days; 4) Anyone else who considers themselves to be at risk for MPV through sex or other intimate contact. *If you have had MPV, you are currently not eligible to get a first or second dose.

How to get vaccinated: In The Bronx, vaccines are available at NYC Dept. of Health Clinics, Lincoln Hospital, and select private medical clinics and centers. You can make your appointment at <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/locations/Monkeypox> or by calling 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692).

Polio Vaccine

What it does: The polio vaccine protects against severe disease caused by poliovirus in almost everyone (99%) who has received all the recommended doses.

Who is eligible: All children should get 4 doses of polio vaccine, starting at age 2 months. People starting the vaccine series after age 4 should receive 3 doses.

How to get vaccinated: If you or your child are not vaccinated yet, talk to a health care provider. If you do not have a provider, call 311 for help finding one. Also, children ages 4 years and older can get low- or no-cost vaccines at the Fort Greene Health Center at 295 Flatbush Ave. Ext., Fifth Floor, Brooklyn. To make an appointment, visit www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/immunization-clinics.page.

QR Corner

Check out these local resources & services and interesting health articles!

The Bronx
Health Link
Women & Infant
Health Advocacy



Bronx Health
REACH
Health and Social
Needs Services

Montefiore
Medical Center
Community
Relations



NYS Community
Air Monitoring
Initiative - Bronx
Quarterly Reports

For more news & updates,
follow the Borough President's
social media!



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