

99-12

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Children's Environmental Health

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports national, state, and local environmental health resources, policies, regulations, programs, and research that will protect children's health, prevent harmful exposures to environmental toxicants, and ensure that all children live in a safe and healthy environment.

- NACCHO supports dedication of federal, state, local, and private funding to support increased collaboration between local health departments (LHDs) and school officials to ensure the provision of a safe school environment. Specific priorities include assisting in the development of food safety programs with healthy food options; reducing and eliminating or considering the use of safe chemical alternatives instead of the use of hazardous chemicals in the school and classroom (e.g., pesticides, cleaning supplies); and providing education to students, teachers, and staff about potential chemical exposures.
- NACCHO supports dedication of federal, state, local, and private funding to support increased collaboration between LHDs and their community partners to ensure that programs focused on educating parents and other family members in creating a healthy home environment for children, especially pertaining to the reduced exposure to environmental hazards (e.g. pesticides, toxic products, especially those containing lead¹) exist.
- LHDs, in collaboration with federal, state, and community partners, should have an active role in promoting healthy activities and play environments for children, including access to parks, nature centers, and green spaces; safe routes for biking and walking; and access to universal playgrounds designed to be accessible to both disabled and able-bodied children.

Justification

Children are vulnerable to environmental threats. Pound-for-pound, children are exposed to more contaminants in the air, food, water, and physical environment than adults. Further, children are more susceptible than adults to environmental exposures because their physiological functions are relatively immature and their developing organs are more vulnerable to harm.²

Yet, children are unrelentingly subject to the same unhealthy environmental conditions as adults. For example, in 2007, 66 percent of children lived in counties in which one or more air pollutants regulated under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards were above allowable levels.³ These environmental conditions also pose disproportionate burdens for children who are racial and ethnic minorities, creating health inequities from an early age. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's *America's Children and the Environment*



(ACE), 71 percent of black non-Hispanic and 78 percent of Hispanic children lived in counties where air quality standards were exceeded compared to 60 percent of white non-Hispanic children.⁴

Children are exposed to environmental burdens through many pathways other than air pollution. For example, 7.8 percent of children live in areas served by community water systems that did not meet all applicable health-based drinking water standards in 2007. In addition to sub-standard water quality, 16 percent of children were served by community water systems that had violations of drinking water monitoring and reporting requirements.⁵ Additionally, chemical burdens pose a serious threat to the health of children. In 2006, children five and under had a median concentration of lead in the blood of 1.6 µg/dL. Mercury also poses a significant risk to children, with a median concentration of 0.9 ppb in the blood of women of child-bearing age (16–49) in 2006.⁶

Record of Action

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors

Nov. 7, 1999

Updated Nov. 10, 2002

Updated November 2004

Updated July 2010

1. NACCHO Policy Statement 00-03 Child Lead Poisoning Elimination
2. Mott, L. Fore, D. Curtis, J. and Solomon G. (1997). *Our Children at Risk: The 5 worst Environmental Threats to Their Health*. New York, NY: Natural Resources Defense Council.
3. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2009*.
4. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *America's Children and the Environment, 2007-2008 update*
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.