

"What is the connection between respiratory illness and children living in poor housing conditions?"

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Clinical Issue

A large number of New Zealand children live in sub-standard housing conditions which is a major public health issue. The home environment has a large impact on people that reside within these dwellings, in particular children.

Children spend about 90% of their time in the home, if they live in poor housing they are at risk of developing many health problems. Respiratory illness in particular has been seen to be a large problem in children.

Child poverty is present within our country and inadequate housing has been shown to be a contributing factor towards this.



Main findings from literature review

Research has shown that:

- Too much moisture in a home makes it harder to heat. Damp homes promote mould growth, which can cause development of respiratory problems.
- Children are greatly affected by mould due to the fact that their respiratory systems are still developing causing vulnerability to the allergens. Constant exposure may affect lung function and development.
- Lack of insulation is a major contributor to a cold home, due to the inability of the house to retain any heat. The home is harder to heat; therefore money is wasted trying to keep it sufficiently warm.
- Research has proved that insulating homes improves respiratory symptoms of children living within the home
- 70% of New Zealand children living in poverty live in a rental accommodation.
- Many rental homes have been found to be not insulated, have poor heating options, are damp, they leak and therefore have a presence of mould.
- A larger proportion of Māori and Pacific children live in substandard housing and are affected by respiratory illness
- Children make up a large percentage of people hospitalised due to severe acute respiratory tract infections.

Summary

Poor housing conditions have been proven to cause respiratory illness in children living in damp, un-insulated homes.

Nurses can educate people on how to reduce moisture and humidity in the home and use ventilation to prevent mould growth.

Mould is allergenic and contributes to cough and wheeze in young children causing them to develop respiratory illness. Children who live in poor housing conditions such as rental accommodation are more at risk of being exposed to damp, un-insulated and mouldy housing, therefore as the research has shown these children are at greater risk of developing respiratory illness.

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