Poverty in the USA and asthma, autism and attention deficit disorder

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Poverty has a profound effect on child health (Fig. 1). The reported incidence of asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is rising. Investigators studied data reported by parents to US National Survey of Children's Health in 2003, 2007 and 2011–2012, to determine if reported incidence is influenced differentially by poverty status.[1] The lifetime prevalence of all three target disorders increased during the study period: asthma rose 18%, from 12.5% in 2003 to 14.6% in 2011–2012, ADHD rose 44%, from 6.9% in 2003 to 9.9% in 2011–2012, and ASD rose more than four-fold, from 0.5% in 2003 to 2.3% in 2011–2012. The rise in asthma lifetime prevalence was greatest in the poorest children at 25.8%, particularly uninsured children at 57.9%. The increase in lifetime prevalence of ADHD occurred comparably among all children regardless of poverty. In contrast, increases in the lifetime prevalence of ASD were greater in groups with more financial resources and those with private insurance. The rise was also significantly greater among adolescents, boys and white non-Hispanics. Poor US children are more likely than other US children to be diagnosed with asthma, but less likely to be diagnosed with autism.