

Estimating the Burden of Work-Related Asthma in Ontario: A Provincial Surveillance Initiative

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Background:

Work-related asthma is the most frequent type of work-related lung disease. However, currently there is a lack of population-based data in Ontario to fully characterize the burden and morbidity associated with work-related asthma, and thereby promote early recognition, diagnosis and timely intervention. A provincial surveillance initiative known as the Ontario Occupational Asthma Surveillance Network (OCAS) is ongoing to address this gap.

Objectives:

To provide estimates of prevalence data for work-related asthma (WRA)

To raise awareness about WRA among providers

To provide clear guidelines and steps for a uniform reporting mechanism for WRA

To feedback to participating physicians

Program Description and Methods:

A voluntary physician-reporting network to report work-related disease has been established. Any specialists and physicians who see patients with confirmed or suspected work-related asthma are invited to participate. Participation involves reporting the number of patients with suspected or confirmed work-related asthma seen each month. This surveillance represents a unique collaborative effort spanning varying specialists and primary care health providers.

Conclusion:

This initiative is the first population-based surveillance system for work-related asthma in Ontario. Surveillance will promote effective planning, implementation and evaluation of work-related asthma control programs. This strategy will provide a broad outreach and ensure consistent messages across the province. The data collected will complement existing data sources such as the compensation data, which is known to be associated with underreporting.

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