

# Housing and Health

## DEFINITION

*Housing and health* is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in low-income families that reside in older housing, defined as housing built before 1980. Low-income families are those with incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty level.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Homes that are dry, clean, pest-free, safe, contaminant-free, well-ventilated, well-maintained, and thermally-controlled can provide a healthy environment for children and residents.<sup>1</sup> Safe, affordable, and stable housing maintains the health and well-being of families and children, supporting mental and emotional health as well as physical safety. Healthy housing also protects families from weather, environmental hazards, and injury and provides a safe place for children to eat, sleep, play, and grow.<sup>2,3</sup>

Unhealthy housing can cause or intensify many health conditions. Studies have connected poor quality construction, utility deficiencies, water intrusion, lead paint, radon, and pests to respiratory illnesses, asthma, unintentional injuries, lead poisoning, and cancer. Children under age five, low-income children, and Children of Color are at increased risk for fall injuries due to unsafe sleep and home environments, including aging and

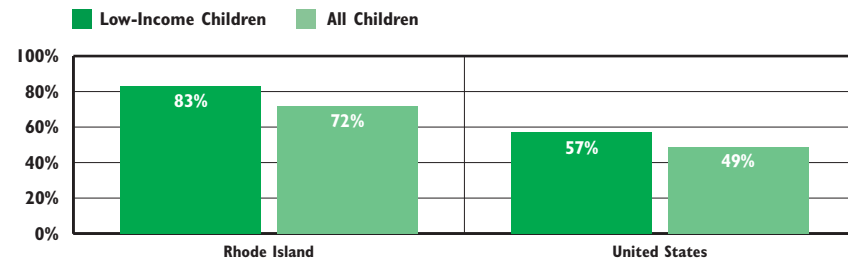
deteriorating housing.<sup>4,5</sup>

Poor quality housing is also a strong predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in low-income children and youth as well as academic achievement. Adolescents living in poorer quality homes have lower reading and math proficiency than their peers.<sup>6</sup>

The quality and stability of children's homes can have long-term effects on children. Lack of adequate and affordable housing puts safe, healthy, well-maintained homes out of reach for many families. Families may be forced to move frequently in search of better, more affordable housing, or to raise their children in overcrowded and unsafe environments that can interfere with their growth, development, health, and academic performance. Overcrowded housing is associated with mental health concerns, stress, sleep problems, injury, and exposure to disease, while multiple moves are associated with behavioral and mental health concerns, academic difficulties, and substance use.<sup>7</sup>

Adopting a comprehensive "healthy homes" approach that addresses multiple housing deficiencies simultaneously can help prevent housing-related injuries and illnesses, reduce health costs, and improve children's quality of life. Because the causes of many health conditions related to the home environment are interconnected, it can be cost-effective to address multiple hazards simultaneously.<sup>8,9</sup>

  
**Children Living in Older Housing\*, 2015-2019,  
Rhode Island and the United States**



Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microsample (PUMS) data. \*Older housing is defined as built before 1980. The ACS reports housing year built by decade, so this is the best available approximation for housing built before 1978 when interior lead paint was banned. Factbooks prior to 2016 are not comparable due to the discontinuation of 3-year ACS data.

◆ **Between 2015 and 2019, Rhode Island had the highest percentage of low-income children (83%) and the second highest percentage of children of all incomes (72%) living in older housing in the U.S., after New York.**<sup>10</sup>

◆ **Lead Poisoning:** Children living in homes built before 1978 are at risk for lead poisoning. Even at low levels, lead exposure can negatively affect a child's health, development, and brain.<sup>11</sup> In 2020, 631 (3%) of Rhode Island children under age six who were screened had a confirmed blood lead level of  $\geq 5$   $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ .<sup>12</sup>

◆ **Asthma:** Asthma is the most common chronic condition in children and a leading cause of school absences and hospitalization for children under age 18 in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Between 2015 and 2019, there were 3,783 emergency department visits of Rhode Island children ages six and under (9.3 per 1,000) for which asthma was the primary diagnosis.<sup>14</sup>

◆ **Unintentional Injuries:** Falls are the leading cause of non-fatal unintentional injuries among children in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> In 2019, housing-related falls resulted in 1,254 emergency room visits by Rhode Island children ages six and under.<sup>16</sup>

◆ **Weatherization Assistance Program:** This program helps income-eligible households reduce heating bills by providing whole-house energy efficiency and safety services. In 2020, 1,078 Rhode Island children under age 18 benefited from 839 completed weatherization projects administered by seven Community Action Program agencies.<sup>17,18</sup>

Table 25.

## Housing and Health, Rhode Island

CITY/TOWN	TOTAL # OF CHILDREN AGES 6 AND UNDER 2010	CHILDREN WITH LEAD POISONING 2020			PRIMARY ASTHMA ED VISITS 2015-2019		HOUSING RELATED FALLS 2020	WEATHERIZATION PROJECTS 2020	% HOUSING STOCK PRE-1980
		#	TESTED	%	#	RATE PER 1,000			
Barrington	1,213	3	438	*	54	8.9	22	8	81%
Bristol	1,316	3	291	*	31	4.7	9	3	67%
Burrillville	1,186	8	189	*	18	3.0 <sup>^</sup>	10	19	63%
Central Falls	2,374	35	626	5.6% <sup>^</sup>	189	15.9	38	10	87%
Charlestown	493	0	73	0.0%	5	*	3	10	51%
Coventry	2,508	1	481	*	89	7.1	28	25	66%
Cranston	5,814	47	1,402	3.4%	186	6.4	95	101	77%
Cumberland	2,603	10	552	*	50	3.8	34	9	64%
East Greenwich	930	0	244	0.0%	17	3.7 <sup>^</sup>	9	9	62%
East Providence	3,545	24	1,023	2.3% <sup>^</sup>	125	7.1	54	44	84%
Exeter	390	1	74	*	9	*	7	11	55%
Foster	315	0	55	0.0%	6	*	2	3	61%
Glocester	633	1	97	*	6	*	10	7	63%
Hopkinton	618	0	81	0.0%	13	4.2 <sup>^</sup>	7	5	61%
Jamestown	287	0	46	0.0%	8	*	2	3	56%
Johnston	1,930	4	433	*	52	5.4	27	33	66%
Lincoln	1,490	5	333	*	40	5.4	22	4	70%
Little Compton	188	0	21	0.0%	5	*	2	1	64%
Middletown	1,331	2	266	*	57	8.6	25	4	65%
Narragansett	739	1	64	*	8	*	6	4	59%
New Shoreham	57	2	9	*	1	*	1	0	50%
Newport	1,792	17	329	5.2% <sup>^</sup>	105	11.7	36	4	82%
North Kingstown	1,965	1	419	*	45	4.6	24	20	63%
North Providence	2,040	5	570	*	104	10.2	32	27	68%
North Smithfield	752	3	149	*	7	*	11	5	68%
Pawtucket	6,835	72	1,664	4.3%	406	11.9	109	74	86%
Portsmouth	1,206	1	244	*	31	5.1	23	5	59%
Providence	16,934	305	5,649	5.4%	1,420	16.8	304	233	86%
Richmond	635	0	79	0.0%	11	*	7	1	50%
Scituate	608	1	162	*	8	*	10	5	65%
Smithfield	1,076	5	231	*	21	3.9 <sup>^</sup>	17	8	62%
South Kingstown	1,707	3	290	*	28	3.3	20	11	55%
Tiverton	1,006	0	260	0.0%	10	*	12	17	60%
Warren	727	6	184	*	24	6.6 <sup>^</sup>	10	5	77%
Warwick	5,561	18	1,133	1.6% <sup>^</sup>	179	6.4	85	56	80%
West Greenwich	446	0	66	0.0%	8	*	11	2	32%
West Warwick	2,351	10	471	*	99	8.4	43	18	70%
Westerly	1,735	5	206	*	34	3.9	16	5	60%
Woonsocket	4,212	32	818	3.9%	274	13.0	71	30	86%
Four Core Cities	30,355	444	8,757	5.1%	2,289	15.1	522	347	86%
Remainder of State	51,193	187	10,965	1.7%	1,494	5.8	732	492	67%
Rhode Island	81,548	631	19,722	3.2%	3,783	9.3	1,254	839	73%

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Children Ages Six and Under: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010. Table PCT12.

Children with Lead Poisoning: Rhode Island Department of Health, Healthy Homes and Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, 2020. The numerator is the number of Rhode Island children with a confirmed blood lead level  $\geq 5$   $\mu\text{g/dL}$  in calendar year 2020. The denominator is the number of children who were tested in calendar year 2020. Data are for children under age six.

Children with Asthma: Rhode Island Department of Health, Hospital Discharge Database, 2015-2019. The Rhode Island Department of Health defines emergency department (ED) visits for children with a primary asthma diagnosis as those resulting in a home discharge or another facility, but not admitted to the hospital as an inpatient. Children with multiple ED visits are counted as a new event for each admission, so some children are counted more than once. For details, see Children with Asthma indicator. Data are for children ages six and under.

Housing Related Falls: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2019. Data are for children ages six and under who are residents of Rhode Island.

Weatherization Projects: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Weatherization Assistance Program data, 2020. Weatherization projects are defined as those receiving a final inspection by end of calendar year 2020.

Housing Stock Pre-1980: Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microsample (PUMS) data. Table B25034. Older housing is defined as built before 1980. The ACS reports housing year built by decade, so this is the best available approximation for housing built before 1978 when interior lead paint was banned.

\* The data are statistically unreliable and rates are not reported and should not be calculated.

<sup>^</sup> The data are statistically unstable and rates or percentages should be interpreted with caution.

(Continued with references on page 182)