

Children and Adolescents with Asthma

How Can You Help?

Asthma is a disease that affects airways in the lungs and is one of the most common long-term diseases. Asthma may cause wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, or coughing at night or early in the morning. An asthma episode can happen when a person is exposed to **asthma triggers**, such as tobacco smoke, mold, dust mites, cockroaches, pets, fragrances, and exercise.¹ Colds and flu can also cause asthma symptoms to worsen. Asthma symptoms can be controlled by avoiding triggers and using medications prescribed by a health care provider, if needed. Asthma that is not well controlled may lead to emergency room visits, and possibly being admitted to the hospital. It is the leading cause of days missed at school.² Schools can support students with asthma by working with families and medical providers to help manage asthma care at school. Healthy students are more likely to have better attendance, grades, and test scores.³



What's Happening at School?

Knowing the answers to the following questions can help you support your child's school to address asthma. If you don't know the answers to these questions, check out the school handbook or school website, attend a school wellness meeting or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, or simply ask your child's teacher.

1. Is there a full-time registered nurse in the school building at all times, or a school-based health center to help children with chronic medical conditions or emergencies?
2. How does the school identify and share confidential information about students with asthma?
3. Does the school require that each student with asthma have a current Asthma Action Plan on file?⁴
4. Does the school allow students to carry their own medication, such as an inhaler, at school?
5. What are the school protocols if a student is having asthma symptoms at school, on the school bus, on a field trip, or in cases of emergency or lockdown?
6. Are other school staff, such as teachers, bus drivers, and food services staff, trained to recognize and respond to a student that may be having asthma symptoms?
7. What is the policy for student participation in physical activity (e.g., recess or classroom activity breaks) or physical education at school if he or she has asthma?
8. Is there a bullying prevention policy in the school or district that discourages bullying or encourages awareness or anti-stigma of students with medical conditions?
9. Does the school or district have an **indoor air quality management program** to improve the school environment and reduce exposure to asthma triggers?





Ideas for Parents

You can be involved in your child's school by **attending** meetings, workshops, or training events offered by the school; **communicating** with school staff and other parents; **volunteering** for school events or in your child's classroom; **reinforcing** healthy messages and practices your child learns at school; **helping** make decisions about health in the school; and **being part** of community activities supported by the school. Here are some specific ideas for how you can support your child's school in addressing asthma.

- Advocate for a full-time registered nurse in school.
- Have an ongoing conversation with your child to discuss their asthma triggers, their feelings about having asthma, and if they feel safe and supported at school.⁵
- Work with your child's health care provider to provide an Asthma Action Plan for the school and for the timely completion of required school forms. Encourage communication between school health services and your child's health care provider.
- Make sure that the school has your child's emergency asthma medication so that asthma symptoms can be managed at school.
- Keep your emergency contact information up-to-date with the school's registered nurse, teacher and secretary.
- Communicate with your child's teachers, counselors, and school health services staff about your child's asthma triggers and any concerns about coping while at school.
- Join groups, such as the PTA, school wellness committee, or school health advisory council, that address the needs of a supportive and healthy school environment.⁶
- Share research-based websites or written materials about asthma with teachers, nurses, and administrators, when possible, e.g., <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/asthma/index.htm>.
- Advocate for asthma-friendly school policies.



Check out additional resources for parents related to the school nutrition environment and services, physical education and physical activity, and managing chronic health conditions at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/P4HS.htm>.

REFERENCES

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