

Breathe Easy

ASTHMA FACT SHEET

Brought to you by Holtz Children's Hospital



What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease that can make it hard to breathe. When you take a breath, air goes in your lungs through air tubes in your chest. When you have asthma, these tubes can become blocked, making it hard to breathe. The tubes can get blocked due to smoke, dust, or other things around you.

Asthma affects nearly five million children in the U.S. It is the #1 long-term disease among children.

Common symptoms of asthma may include: coughing, wheezing, tightness in the chest and shortness of breath. A person with asthma may even hear herself breathing, or need extra effort to breathe.

The most important thing you can do to prevent asthma in your home is to **control indoor asthma "triggers"** — the things that can set off asthma symptoms. Here is a list of the most common triggers and what you can do to reduce them.

Trigger

Action to Take

Secondhand Tobacco Smoke

- Do not smoke in the home or car, and don't allow others to do so either. This includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes and other smoke-producers such as incense.

Dust Mites

(These are too small to be seen but are found in every home.)

- Use zippered, plastic or specialized covers on pillows and mattresses.
- Wash sheets and blankets in hot water once a week.
- Choose washable stuffed toys and wash them off in hot water and dry thoroughly. Keep stuffed toys off beds.
- Keep humidity inside the house at a low level. The best way to do this is with a dehumidifier that you can buy in any drug store. You can also try to identify where the humidity is coming from and solve the problem.

Pets

- Keep pets out of the bedroom and other sleeping areas at all times.
- Keep pets away from fabric-covered furniture, carpets and stuffed toys.
- If planning to buy a pet, make sure the pet does not shed any hair.

Molds

(Mold grows on damp materials. To control mold, you need to control moisture or wetness.)

- Wash mold off hard surfaces and dry completely.
- Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of water.
- Keep drip pans in your air conditioner, refrigerator, and dehumidifier clean and dry.
- Use exhaust fans or open windows in kitchens and bathrooms when showering, cooking, or using the dishwasher.
- Vent clothes dryers to the outside.

House dust

- Remove dust once a week with a damp cloth, and vacuum carpet and fabric-covered furniture to reduce dust build-up.

Sources: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology; United States Environmental Protection Agency; The Allergy and Asthma Network; and PBSKids.org



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Trigger, continued

Pests

(Droppings or body parts of cockroaches or rodents)

Action to Take, continued

- Do not leave food or garbage out. Make sure garbage cans have a lid.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Clean all food crumbs or spilled liquids right away.
- Try using poison baits, boric acid (for cockroaches), or traps first before using pesticides or sprays.
- If you have to use a spray:
 - Only spray in the infested area.
 - Carefully follow the instructions on the label.
 - Make sure there is plenty of fresh air when you spray, and keep the person with asthma out of the room.

Here are some other possible triggers. Try to limit the use of these items in your home if your child or family member has asthma.

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|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| • Mothballs | • Air Fresheners | • Potpourri | • Herbs | • Cleaning Products* |
| • Garden Chemicals | • Carpet Cleaners | • Cosmetics | • Deodorant | • Aerosol Sprays |
| • Soap* | • Hair Products | • Fabric Softener | • Detergent* | • Petroleum Vapors |
| • Glue | • Fireplaces | • Gasoline | • Paints | |

* Some companies now make these products that are safe for people with asthma or other breathing difficulties. Ask your doctor or nurse for suggestions, or ask the manager of your grocery store or pharmacy.

Breathe Easy Tips

If your child has an asthma attack:

- **Stay calm** and keep the child calm.
- **Stop** what you were doing.
- Make the child **sit down**.
- Tell the child to try to **relax**.
- Give the child quick relief **medication**, such as an inhaler.

Attack Prevention

Tips for Preventing Asthma Attacks

- Talk to a doctor or nurse about how to control your child's asthma.
- Make a plan about what you need to do to handle an attack.
- Understand your child's medicines and how to use them.
- Be aware of the triggers that can start an asthma attack.
- Asthma-proof your home using the chart above.

Managing Asthma

You and your child should have a written asthma management plan. This plan will help with three important things:

1. Tells you and your child what medication he should take even when he is well.
2. Gives instructions on how to add more medication when your child starts having symptoms.
3. Provides information on when to call the doctor or 911.

Communicate

Follow these important steps to be sure your child's asthma is under control at school.

1. Set up a meeting for the first week of school with your child's teachers, the school nurse and sports coach.
2. Talk to them about the important information listed below:
 - How long your child has had asthma.
 - Your child's current health.
 - The medications your child takes and what each one does.
 - Instructions on how to use the medications prescribed by the doctor.
 - How to identify an asthma emergency and how to handle it.
 - Instructions on how to use devices such as a peak flow meter.
 - Your child's ability to manage his/her asthma, and when help will be needed.
 - Your child's known asthma triggers.
 - A list of activities that bring on symptoms, such as outdoor activities during cold weather or on days when humidity levels are high.
3. With your child's teachers, develop a plan for making up any missed work due to asthma.
4. Write your child's name on any medication left at school with the nurse or teacher. Put the medication in a plastic bag with a note that has:
 - The medication name.
 - Instructions for when and how to use the medication.
 - Your telephone number (including cell phone or beeper).
 - Your doctor, clinic or pharmacy's telephone number.



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