



Asthma Awareness for Families

For millions of people, taking a breath is a major accomplishment. A major reason for this is asthma. Asthma affects 5 million children and is the leading illness of children in the United States. Asthma is a leading cause of missed school days due to illness. Also, five times more children die from asthma than adults each year, which kills about 4,000 people total each year.

Asthma “triggers” are things that make asthma worse. These “triggers” include things such as dust mites, pollen, mold, cold air, secondhand smoke, pets, and cockroaches. These “triggers” are often found indoors, where Americans spend 90% of their time.

1. What is asthma?

- Asthma is the most common childhood disease.
- Children with asthma have sensitive, inflamed airways in their lungs.
- They are bothered by many things that start (or “trigger”) their symptoms and make their asthma worse.
- Asthma can usually be kept under control, with the use of medications and avoiding things that trigger symptoms.
- When asthma gets out of control and an asthma episode starts, the airways become very inflamed. The muscles around the airways tighten up and begin to plug up with mucus. This makes it very difficult to breathe.
- It is best to try to keep airway inflammation under control to help prevent symptoms and flare-ups.

2. What things “trigger” asthma? A doctor can help to determine an individual child’s “triggers” through an examination, medical history and allergy tests. Below are the most common things that “trigger” asthma:

- Allergens such as: molds and mildew, dust mites, plant pollens, animal dander, latex, and pests (mice, rats and cockroaches)
- Irritants such as:
 - Smoke from cigarettes, candles, wood fires, and charcoal grills
 - Fumes from household cleaners, paint, perfumes, air fresheners and “plug-ins”, gasoline, and art supplies with odors
 - Cold air and sudden weather changes
- If asthma is not well controlled, exercise and activities such as laughing, yelling and crying can trigger an asthmatic episode.



3. How can "triggers" be avoided? Some triggers are very common in the home. For example:

- Choose not to smoke in your home or car and do not allow others to do so either.
- Wash sheets and blankets once a week in hot water. Avoid pillows or stuffed animals that can't be washed in hot water and dried thoroughly.
- Be sure to vacuum, dust often, and keep clutter to a minimum. Be sure to remove the dust and not just stir it up.
- Consider keeping pets outside. Keep pets out of bedroom and off furniture.
- Molds grow on damp materials. The key to mold control is moisture control. If mold is a problem in your home, clean up the mold and get rid of the excess moisture.
- Do not spray cleaning products when children with asthma are there. To disinfect, wet a cloth with a mild bleach solution and wipe surfaces clean.
- Adjust outdoor time for cold-sensitive or pollen-sensitive children and offer indoor activities instead. (See below for Air Quality Index and pollen count)

4. What information should my child's school or day care have? Each child should have an "Asthma Action Card" on file at school or day care. The card should be filled out with specific information about the child and be signed by the parent/guardian and the child's physician. The card should explain:

- Their asthma "triggers"
- Their medications and instructions on use (may be inhaled, tablets, or syrups):
 - **Long-Term Control Medications:** These medications help to prevent asthma episodes by reducing chronic swelling and inflammation in the airways.
 - **Quick-relief medications:** These are called bronchodilators because they open up the airways by relaxing tightened muscles.
- The symptoms that indicate when their asthma is worsening or getting out of control. Early warning signs may include tiredness, coughing, and itching. These symptoms may progress to wheezing, struggling to breathe, and having a tightness that can be seen in the chest and neck.



Additional Resources:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - www.epa.gov/asthma. Visit this web site for more information about controlling asthma triggers at home, school and child care.

Metro Health Department Air Quality Data (Air Quality Index and Pollen Count) website - http://health/ENV/AQI_main.asp

Metro Health Department current Air Quality Index and Pollen Count recording – **(615) 340-0488**

For additional materials or information, please contact the Metro Health Department Pollution Control Division at **(615) 340-5653**