

Module 1: Asthma Information for Parents

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Things to Know as a Parent of a Child who has Asthma

As a parent of a child who has Asthma, it may seem overwhelming at times to know how to handle your child's condition. This online guide is meant to point out key things you need to know that will help you have more confidence. You will find more detailed information about asthma, in the asthma section for teens and young adults in a different part of this website. This set of information for parents will focus on:

- General information about asthma treatment and prevention
- Understanding your child's warning signs of an asthma attack
- Understanding an asthma action plan is and how to use it
- Information on what to do in case of an emergency
- Working with your child's doctor
- Know how to talk to your child's school personnel about asthma
- Online resources to help you and your child understand asthma better

At any point, if you have questions about any of the information listed in this module, be sure to contact your child's doctor or community healthcare worker (CHW) so you can understand more/better!



Overview of Asthma

Asthma is a chronic (long-lasting) disease of the lungs. This disease causes airways in the lungs to tighten, swell and fill with mucus, making it hard to breathe. An asthma attack is serious. A person having an asthma attack may need emergency treatment, and may even die if they are not treated. The good news is that asthma is very treatable. With proper care, children and adults with asthma can lead active and healthy lives.

Good asthma management helps children live full healthy lives and stay out of the emergency room. Here are the key parts:

1. Monitoring your child's symptoms (such as breathlessness) so treatment can be provided before asthma attacks occur. You will need to get to know what warning signs your child shows when they are having trouble breathing. This may be different depending on your child's age.
2. Providing medication as prescribed by your child's doctor. It's important for you to know what type of medicine will be needed at what time. There are medicines your child may be taking daily or maybe only when they are having trouble breathing.
3. Removing asthma triggers from your child's environment. This means figuring out which things in the environment make your child's asthma symptoms worse like dust in the air or eating certain foods.
4. Educating everyone who cares for your child so they understand how to manage your child's asthma – including recognizing asthma symptoms, identifying and removing triggers, and providing the correct treatment.

Remember, you can find more detailed information about asthma and how it affects your child when you visit the asthma section for teens and young adults found on the main page.



Signs of an Asthma Attack

It's very important to understand your child's behavior and signs that they are having trouble breathing. These are called warning signs.

Because every child is different, there is no way to tell you exactly what symptoms your child will show. That's why it is important to watch your child closely to see what symptoms they have when he or she having trouble breathing. It may be very obvious what is happening because your child will share they are having trouble breathing or maybe their chest will hurt. Sometimes you may see their mood change suddenly and they become irritable, shaky, nervous, or unusually quiet. Be sure to listen to how they describe what is happening to them.

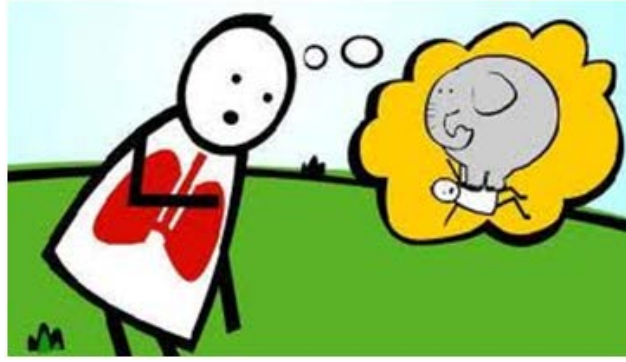
Here is a general list of signs your child may or may not show:

- Shortness of breath and tightness in the chest
- Wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing)
- A cough that doesn't go away, especially at night
- Itchy, scratchy, or sore throat
- Waking up at night
- Dark circles under eyes
- Itchy, glassy or watery eyes
- Change in face color-pale or flushed

When you see these warning signs, you should have an asthma action plan that you have discussed with your child's doctor to know which medicine your child should take.

When your child is having trouble breathing, try and keep them quiet and still. Have the child sit up. Do not force a child who is having breathing difficulty to lie down because this can actually make it harder to breath.

After giving medication, if your child can be moved, bring them to a quiet place, out of the cold or extreme heat. If your child is having breathing difficulties, do not make them walk on his/her own. Try to stay calm, and reassure your child that it will be okay.



What is an Asthma Action Plan?

An Asthma Action Plan is a plan that helps you and your child know how to deal with Asthma. It is a plan created by you and your child's doctor to help you know what to do to help your child when they are having trouble breathing.

An asthma action plan is generally divided into 3 or 4 sections based on the symptoms your child may have. One way a doctor might suggest is to divide it based on the colors of a traffic light so it's easy for you and your child to remember.

- The green section gives you information for when your child is not having any breathing problems at all. It will tell you if your child needs to take any type of daily medication to help keep breathing normal.
- The yellow section tells you and your child what to do when you notice their breathing get worse. It will probably say to have your child take a fast-acting or rescue medicine given by your child's doctor.
- The red section tells you what to do when your child's breathing is not getting better with medication and how to act in an emergency. This will most likely say to call 911 right away!

ASTHMA ACTION PLAN														
Name: _____	Date: _____													
ASTHMA IS UNDER CONTROL • Normal breathing • No cough or wheeze • Normal activity • Normal sleep • No need for Reliever medicine Keep Up The Good Work!	Green Level—Good Control WHAT SHOULD I DO? CONTROLLER <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>MEDICINE</th><th>PUFFS/DOSE</th><th>TIMES/DAY</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></tbody></table> RELIEVER <table border="1"><thead><tr><th> </th><th>As needed</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></tbody></table> • Reliever medicine can be used for asthma symptoms (cough, wheeze, difficulty breathing).	MEDICINE	PUFFS/DOSE	TIMES/DAY								As needed		
MEDICINE	PUFFS/DOSE	TIMES/DAY												
	As needed													
TIME TO TAKE ACTION! • Cold symptoms • Symptoms at night • Symptoms with activity • Reliever medicine used more than 3 times a week for symptoms • Start or increase Controller medicine • When better, return to Green Level	Yellow Level—Caution CONTROLLER <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>MEDICINE</th><th>PUFFS/DOSE</th><th>TIMES/DAY</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></tbody></table> RELIEVER <table border="1"><thead><tr><th> </th><th>As needed</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr></tbody></table> • If Reliever medicine is needed every 4 hours, call your doctor. • See your doctor if asthma symptoms are not improving after two days.	MEDICINE	PUFFS/DOSE	TIMES/DAY								As needed		
MEDICINE	PUFFS/DOSE	TIMES/DAY												
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GET HELP! • Reliever medicine needed in less than 3 hours • Reliever medicine does not begin to improve asthma symptoms in 10 minutes	RED LEVEL—DANGER GO TO THE CLOSEST EMERGENCY IMMEDIATELY! • Use Reliever medicine as much as needed on the way to the Emergency!													
Comments: _____														
Doctor: _____	Phone Number: _____													
Visit www.caaec.ca														
<small>May be reproduced with permission from The Children's Allergy & Asthma Education Centre (2014) (2014-2017)</small>														

An Asthma Emergency

The best thing you can do to prepare for an asthma emergency is to figure out what to do BEFORE it happens! Talk with your child's doctor to figure out an action plan for when your child is having an asthma emergency. An asthma emergency is different than an asthma attack. In this case, your child's medicines are not helping your child to breath better.

Here are the warning signs:

- Your child's asthma symptoms get worse very quickly
- Your child has severe shortness of breath
- They have trouble speaking comfortably and their lips may look blue
- Pale looking skin
- Wheezing
- Rapid breathing
- Cannot walk or talk
- They have little relief from their reliever inhaler
- If your child's breathing does not get better with the medication, you need to make sure you get emergency help!

Infant Warning Signs:

- Sits up, refuses to lie down
- Stops feeding o Audible wheezing
- Pale or bluish looking skin –anywhere
- Irritable
- Rapid breathing
- Drawing of muscles at the neck when breathing – it may look like the skin is being tugged in. If you see this, you must take your child to the doctor



Medicines for Asthma

Depending on what your child's doctor has suggested, you need to understand the different types of medicines that your child may need to use. There are 2 main types of medicines:

- Quick relief or Rescue medicines. This is what your child needs to take as soon as they feel an asthma attack starting. These medicines are made to help your child be able to breathe better right away. These are usually medicines that help relax the airways. Sometimes the doctor can recommend that your child takes this before they do exercise or other activities.

Some common names of these types of medicine are Proventil HFA, ProAir HFA, Ventolin HFA, albuterol, Maxair, and Xopenex

- Every day or controller medicines- Some asthma medicines should be taken every day. These medicines are called controller or maintenance because they help keep the lungs working as they are supposed to. These medicines should be taken even when your child's asthma is not bothering them.

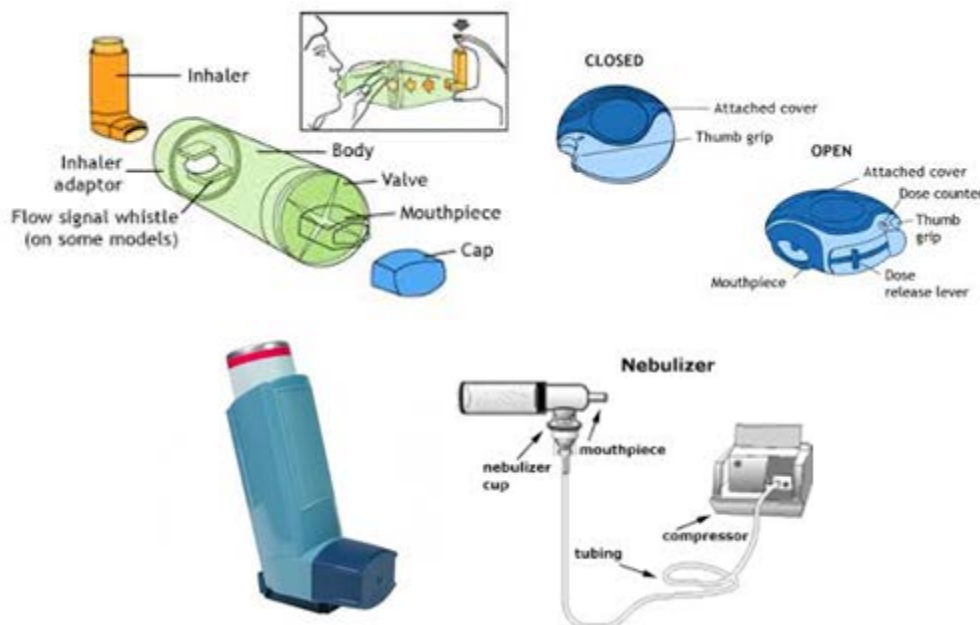
Some common brand names are Singulair, Flovent, Advair, Pulmicort, Symbicort and QVAR. Remember, controller medicines should not be taken during an asthma attack. You should use a quick relief or rescue medicine instead. If you don't know which inhaler is the right one to take for quick relief, ask your doctor or community health worker before you have an asthma attack. For more detailed information, visit AIM for Healthy Lungs: [Medication Section](#)



Things to Know as a Parent of a Child who has Asthma

There are different ways that asthma medication can be taken by your child. Here is a basic overview:

- Inhalers are used to send medicine to the lungs. Your child will inhale the medicine from this device. To watch a video about the proper way to use an inhaler, see the [American Lung Association](#) Video
- Spacers are often used by younger children to help make sure that asthma medication gets inside the lungs. It is a device that is attached to the inhaler to make it easier to get the breathe the medicine in the lungs. You can see a video about how to use an inhaler and a spacer if you [click here](#). Asthma.ca offers great instructions and tips for spacers too.
- A Diskus Inhaler is a flat, round device that is used to deliver asthma medicines in powder form. It has a dose counter window so you can see how many doses are left. [Asthma.ca](#) offers some easy instructions on how to use a diskus.
- A nebulizer is a compressed air machine that turns liquid asthma medicine into a fine mist you can easily breathe. Nebulizers are good for young children and people who have severe asthma. To learn more about using a Nebulizer and how to clean it, visit the AIM for Health Lungs: [Nebulizer Section](#)



Asthma Triggers

There are certain things that actually make asthma worse. The things that can cause problems for your child are called “triggers”, because they can trigger an asthma attack. Different people have different triggers. It is important to know what your child’s triggers are so that they can avoid them and have less of a risk for breathing problems.

The best thing you can do is understand what things can trigger an asthma attack and which ones affect your child. You can try keeping a notebook to track when your child is having trouble breathing. It is helpful to know what things you should avoid. Be sure to share this information with your child’s doctor.

There are many different triggers, and not every child has the same ones. For some children, a single trigger can set off an asthma attack. For others, several triggers add up to cause an asthma attack. It is important to find out what the triggers are for each child with asthma in your care. Reduce or remove as many asthma triggers as you can.

Here are just a few examples:

- Dust mites
- Pollution
- Pollen
- Strong odors or sprays
- Exercise
- Strong Emotions

A couple of good websites to go to for more information are [NoAttacks](#) and [Get Asthma Help](#).



Talking to Your Child's School About Asthma

It's important that the teachers and staff at your child's school know that your child has asthma and be familiar with what they need to do when your child is having trouble breathing.

There will be times when your child will need to stay home from school because their asthma is causing them to have trouble breathing. Here are the signs for your child to stay home:

- Wheezing or coughing continues after treatment
- Child has trouble breathing or is breathing fast
- Child is too weak or tired to take part in normal activities (dressing self, eating, playing)

You will also need to know your child's school policy when it comes to taking care of your child's asthma.

Do they know how to handle asthma emergencies? Do they have medicine on campus? What's their attendance policy? How will they make adjustments for you child participating in sports or exercise classes?

Here are some websites that give more details about talking to your child's school:

- AIM for Healthy Lungs goes over a timeline for discussing things with your child's school before the year starts: [Click Here](#)
- The Breathing Association has some helpful tips: [Click Here](#)
- The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia highlights some key points to think about with your child's school: [Click Here](#)

Explaining Asthma to Your Child

Sometimes it can be hard to explain certain topics about asthma to your child. Here are some things to remember:

- Talk about how normal lungs work
- Talk about what happens during an asthma attack
- Talk about the medicine they need to take
- Talk about going to the doctor
- Talk about triggers
- Talk about what an asthma action plan is and what they need to do when

To learn more about explaining these points to your child, visit the [AIM for Healthy Lungs](#).

You can also visit any of these websites to explore more information about explaining asthma to your child:

- [Lungtropolis](#) provided by the American Lung Association is an interactive website designed for children with asthma between the ages of 5 to 10 and their parents.
- The [American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology](#) offers an interactive website with games, puzzles, videos and more.



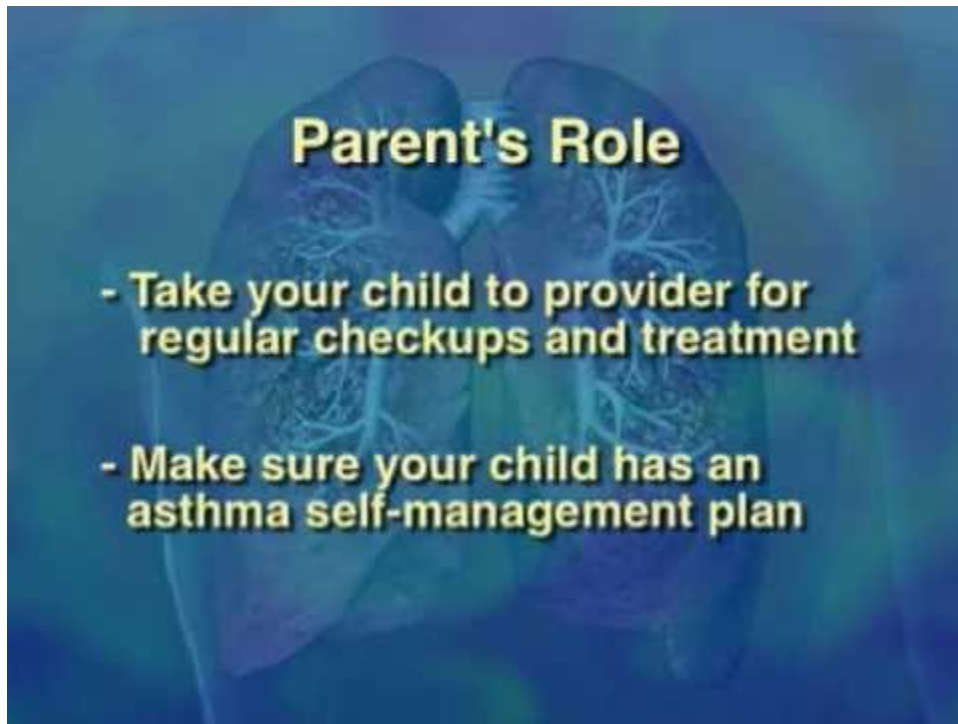
Videos Just for Parents

Here are some videos that are specifically for parents who have a child with asthma:

Kids health offers a short video about parent experiences



The Center of Excellence for Medical Multimedia has a video just for parents that shares the parent role when you have a child with asthma.



The Methodist Children's hospital offers a video that gives an overview of the different types of asthma medicines and the different ways they are given.



Seattle Children's Hospital offers a good video that explains asthma in different age groups of children.



Visit the Module 7 for the youth program to find videos about young people dealing with asthma.

The Palo Alto Medical Foundation has a series of short videos that give detailed instructions on different asthma medicines and how to give them to children.

Learn More Information

To learn more about any of the information provided in this guide, please visit the websites where the information is from :

Sesame Workshop, in collaboration with United Healthcare, has developed the [Sesame Street A is for Asthma](#) tool kit that is filled with activities to help people learn how maintain asthma control and avoid asthma attacks.

The Asthma Initiative of Michigan offers information to help you learn how to manage your child's Asthma. [Click here](#).

[No Attacks](#) gives you easy to understand information about you helping your child to avoid asthma attacks.

[Kids Health](#) offers easy to understand explanations of many different aspects of Asthma.



The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) has a really great guide that helps parents learn the basics about helping care for your child's asthma.

The [Department of Public Health of Massachusetts](#) created a guide just for parents caring for their child with asthma.



Congratulations! You have just completed the CHECK Asthma Online Program!

Even though you are finished, you can always go back to any module to review any information!