

Learn about asthma

Learn about asthma and the early warning signs before asthma gets out of control. Work with your child's doctor. Come up with an asthma action plan that works for your child.

What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten and swell. It is common among children and teens. (Asthma can develop and show signs at varying ages – discuss your symptoms with your physician).

What is an asthma attack?

An asthma attack happens when your child has asthma and their lungs aren't getting enough air to breathe. Your child may cough or wheeze during an attack. Other signs that your child's asthma is worsening include: cough especially when sleeping; congestion or other allergy type symptoms; wheezing and mild chest retractions; cries easily or is grumpy and irritable; dark circles under eyes; and/or your child has changes in his/hers appetite.

What causes an asthma attack?

Things that cause asthma attacks are called triggers. Triggers are everywhere. Your child's home or school can be full of triggers such as pests and mold.

Make an asthma action plan

The action plan looks at what triggers or brings on your child's asthma. The plan also includes your child's **daily medicine** needs. And the plan lists **rescue medicines** for quick-relief during an attack or when asthma signs start. Work with your child's doctor and come up with a written action plan for managing your child's asthma.

- Share the asthma action plan with your child's school and school nurses, teachers, babysitters, and family members.
- Talk it over with people in your child's life. In case of an asthma attack they will know what to do. While asthma action plans may differ from doctor to doctor, most plans will address two areas: a **daily program** and a **rescue program**. FOLLOW THE ASTHMA ACTION PLAN. Following the plan can help lower the number of asthma attacks. Talk to your child's doctor if you need to make changes in the plan.

Get rid of your child's asthma triggers

When you remove triggers (a trigger is anything that aggravates or worsens your child's asthma) from your home or keep your child away from triggers outdoors, you help your child stay healthy and have fewer asthma attacks.

Secondhand smoke

- Don't let anyone smoke near your child.
- If you smoke—until you can quit, don't smoke in your home or car.
- Pledge to make your home and car smoke-free by calling **1-866-384-5250** or contact www.wvquitline.com sponsored by the **Division of Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program of West Virginia**.

Dust Mites

Dust mites live in things like sheets, blankets, pillows, mattresses, soft furniture, carpets, and your child's stuffed toys.

What You Can Do:

- Wash bedding in hot water once a week. Dry completely.
- Use dust proof covers on pillows and mattresses.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture every week.
- Choose stuffed toys that you can wash.
- Wash stuffed toys in hot water. Dry completely before your child plays with the toy. (if the toy cannot be washed, place it in the freezer for a few hours – the cold will kill the dust mites and not damage the stuffed toy).

Pets

Any animals in your home such as cats and dogs (animals with fur or feathers).

What You Can Do:

- Find another home for your cat or dog.
- Keep pets outside if possible.
- If you have to have a pet inside, keep it out of your child's bedroom.
- Keep pets off of your furniture.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture when your child is not around.

Cockroaches (“roaches” or other “pests”)

Areas with food and water such as your kitchen and bathroom. Areas where you store paper bags, cardboard boxes, or newspapers such as in your basement (these pests build nests in paper and cardboard products).

What You Can Do:

- Keep counters, sinks, tables, and floors clean and free of clutter. Clean dishes, crumbs, and spills right away.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Seal cracks or openings around or inside cabinets.
- Use roach baits or traps instead of sprays.
- Cover trash cans.

Mold

Mold grows in damp places such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements.

What You Can Do:

- If you see mold, which typically appears as black spots, on hard surfaces, clean it up with soap and water. Let the area dry completely.
- Use exhaust fans or open a window in the bathroom and kitchen when showering, cooking, or washing dishes.
- Fix water leaks as soon as possible to keep mold from growing.
- Dry damp or wet things completely within one to two days to keep mold from growing.

Nitrogen Dioxide

Nitrogen dioxide is a gas that can bother your eyes, nose, and throat. It may also cause shortness of breath.

Where To Look:

This gas can come from appliances inside your home that burn fuels such as gas, kerosene, and wood.

What You Can Do:

- If possible, use fuel-burning appliances that are vented to the outside. Always follow the maker's instructions on how to use these appliances.
- **Gas cooking stoves:** If you have an exhaust fan in the kitchen, use it when you cook. **Never use the stove to keep you warm or heat your house.**
- **Unvented kerosene or gas space heaters:** Use the proper fuel and keep the heater adjusted the right way. Open a window slightly or use an exhaust fan when you are using the heater.
- **Wood stoves:** Make sure the stove doors are tight fitting. Follow the maker's instructions for starting, burning, and putting out the fire.
- **Fireplaces:** Always open the chimney flue before you build a fire.

Outdoor Air Pollution

Small particles and ozone come from things like exhaust from cars and factories, smoke, and road dust.

Where To Look:

Watch for the Air Quality Index, or AQI (www.airnow.gov), during your local weather report. The AQI is a tool that offers you clear information every day on whether air quality in your area could be a health worry. The AQI uses colors to show how much pollution is in the air. Green and yellow mean air pollution levels are low. Orange, red or purple mean pollution is at levels that may make asthma worse.

What You Can Do:

When the AQI reports unhealthy levels (orange, red or purple):

- Have your child play outdoors at times when the air quality is better. In the summer, this may be in the morning.
- Limit outdoor games that involve running hard for a long time.
- Pay attention to your child's asthma warning signs. If you start to see signs, limit outdoor activity. Be sure to talk about this with your child's doctor.

A Note About Chemical Irritants

Chemical irritants found in some products in your house may make your child's asthma worse. Your child's asthma may be worse around scented or unscented products, including cleaners, paints, adhesives, pesticides, cosmetics, or air fresheners.

If you find that your child's asthma gets worse when you use a certain product, consider trying different products. If you must use a product, then you should:

- Make sure your child is not around.
- Open windows or doors, or use an exhaust fan.
- Remember to always follow the instructions on the label.