READY OR NOT HERE IT COMES
THE NEW AND IMPROVED INHALERS

Many changes have occurred over the past decade or two in an attempt to make the world safer and healthier. In 1987 the Montreal Protocol created a treaty that banned several products such as chlorofluorocarbons that deplete the ozone layer. Most products have been altered or changed to meet the guidelines; however, those that were deemed medically necessary were exempt until now. In order to protect the environment, the FDA issued a final mandate in 2005 to ban most uses of chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, which are used as propellants in many inhalers. The CFC inhalers will be entirely removed from the market by December 31, 2008.

Inhalers are relied on by many of the 20 million Americans with asthma and the 24 million with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease to stop potentially life-threatening bronchospasms and restore easier breathing. It wouldn't seem that the small amount of CFCs in a typical inhaler could pose a threat to the environment, but scientists remind us that these CFCs are exhaled intact into the atmosphere and make their way to the stratosphere, where ultraviolet light breaks them down and causes ozone depletion. Regulations banning the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as propellants in albuterol metered-dose inhalers (MDIs) and the onset of the new brand-name hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) products will have far-reaching effects for not only health care, but also for the environment.

CFC-free inhalers have been available for more than a decade. But 4 million to 5 million users have yet to switch according to available data from May 2008.
And there are substantial differences between the products:

- **HFA** based inhalers differ in feel, force and taste.
- **HFA** based inhalers require priming which varies depending on brand.
- **HFA** based inhalers have a shortened shelf-life compared to CFC inhalers.
- **HFA** based inhalers require weekly cleaning of the pump actuator to prevent clogging and reduction of medication delivered.
- **CFC**-based inhalers are harmful to the environment.
- **CFC-**based inhalers will not be available after December 31, 2008.
- **HFA** inhalers are currently available and are the same medicine as the CFC-based version.
- During this transition, manufacturers will gradually reduce their supply of CFC-based inhalers and increase supplies of HFA-based inhalers.
- **A Benefit**: The smaller particles emitted by the HFA inhalers may actually allow more of the drugs to get into tight airways.
- Making the transition to an HFA-based inhaler is a good opportunity to review your overall asthma management plan with your doctor.

Cost is another major factor encompassing the new propellant. The change to HFA has created the lack of a generic drug product available. For people with no insurance, high prices might be the big concern. Although asthma can affect people from all economic strata, it is a disease disproportionately found among low-income people. Federal officials estimate that the new policy could mean an additional $95 a year for each of the 1.25 million asthma patients without health insurance. Currently, HFA inhaler manufacturers have programs for patients who need financial assistance to make the transition successfully.

For more information on medication assistance and other related asthma articles view the "LINKS" section at **http://www.wvasthma.org/.**

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