



**West Virginia**

**asthma**

**Education and Prevention Program**

**West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources**

Winter 2005

Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. I Issue II

## *Breathe in the Mountains*

### Healthy holidays: creating balance throughout the season

*'Tis the season to be - stressed?* The holidays are a stressful time for many people; in addition to our normally hectic lives, there's decorating, extra shopping and social engagements to add to the list – just to name a few.

With all of these things to remember and coordinate, sometimes taking care of ourselves takes a backseat to tradition and obligation, and for someone with a chronic illness this could mean spending the holidays sick and in their bed – or worse yet, in a hospital bed.

Some chronic diseases are worsened by stress, especially asthma.

Stress and strong emotion are asthma triggers, so it is important that people with asthma set limits during the holidays and avoid overextending themselves.

Maintaining balance during the season, although easier said than done, will make the holidays more enjoyable - even if it means not doing some of the things that are *normally* done, to achieve that balance.

Consider starting new holiday traditions in which the focus is on spending intimate relaxing time with family and friends, as opposed to hosting or partaking in events that require a lot of energy and planning.

Incorporating health needs into your daily planner or to-do list, such as using your peak flow meter or taking prescribed maintenance medication, will keep health concerns foremost in your thoughts.

For those who are traveling over the holiday season, having a checklist handy while packing and making travel arrangements can help ensure that important health issues don't get overlooked.

It's easy to get caught up in keeping up with what the neighbors are doing. But just bear in mind, it's not the lights on the house, ornaments on the tree, all your exhausting efforts, or presents that are going to be remembered years from now; it's the warmth and closeness you share with your loved ones that will be etched in their memories.

So as the holiday whirlwind sweeps through the remainder of the year, keep things as simple as possible, take time out to smell the pine and the cinnamon sticks (unless, of course, you're allergic), and have a *jolly* holiday season!

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#### *Upcoming Events*

The next WVAC meeting is scheduled for February 9 at Flatwoods. The location and agenda will be posted to the WVAC website ([www.alawv.org/WVAC\\_folder/WVAC.htm](http://www.alawv.org/WVAC_folder/WVAC.htm)), once it is finalized.

Asthma Awareness Day At the Capitol is scheduled for Thursday, March 6. Mark your calendars!

The state of Ohio is hosting a multi-state asthma conference on March 10, 2006. This meeting is for health care providers/educators and other interested people from the states of Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. If you would like to learn more, please see details (including the agenda) at the following website: [www.ohiolung.org/OACwhatsupwithasthma.htm](http://www.ohiolung.org/OACwhatsupwithasthma.htm)

World Asthma Day 2006 will take place on Tuesday, May 2. Check the Spring issue of *Breathe in the Mountains* for local event information.

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For more information about the WVAEPP, visit our website: [www.wvdhhr.org/bph/oehp/asthma/default.htm](http://www.wvdhhr.org/bph/oehp/asthma/default.htm)

# 12 allergy & asthma tips for the holidays

MILWAUKEE- With the holiday season around the corner, millions of Americans are preparing to decorate their homes and gather for holiday feasts. But for the allergy and asthma sufferer, the holiday season holds several potential triggers, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI).

Whether it's setting up your Christmas tree, visiting your pet owning relatives, or feasting on holiday treats,

allergy triggers may be lurking around every corner.

"With hectic schedules and constant traveling around the holidays, it's easy to forget to take proper care when dealing with allergies and asthma," said Wanda Phipatanakul, MD, MS, AAAAI, vice-chair of the AAAAI's Indoor Allergen Committee. "Remembering to take medication and avoid potential triggers is necessary to keep symptoms under control."

The AAAAI suggests the following 12 tips to help your holiday season be reaction free:

1. Before decorating a live Christmas tree, allow it to dry out on an enclosed porch or garage. You also may want to explore whether the tree retailer has a shaking machine, which will physically remove some allergens from the tree.
2. Clean artificial Christmas trees outside before decorating. They can gather mold and dust in storage.
3. Wash fabric decorations in hot, soapy water before displaying.
4. Use plastic, metal or glass decorations that cannot trap dust mites.
5. When spraying artificial snow on windows or other surfaces, be sure to follow directions. These

sprays can irritate your lungs if you inhale them.

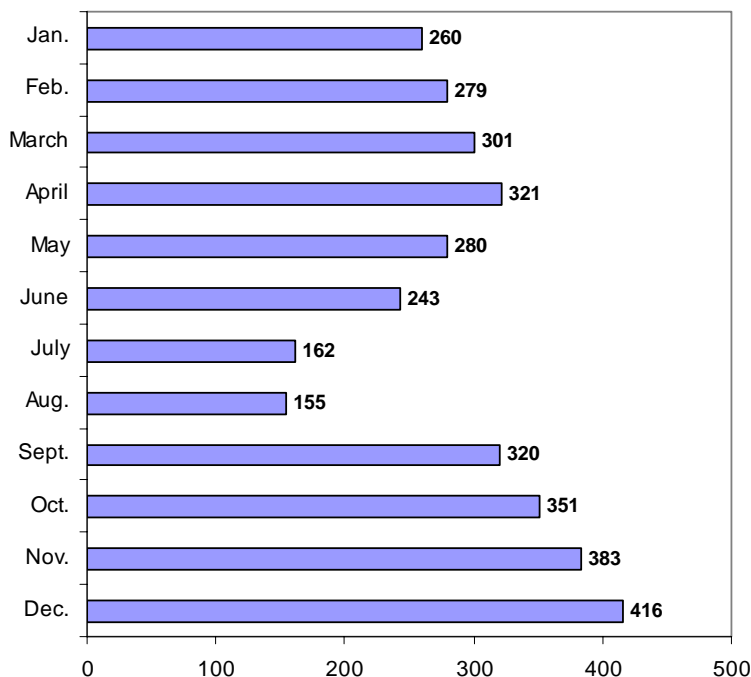
6. When attending holiday parties, inform the host about your food allergy and ask about the ingredients used to prepare the meal.
7. Carry self-injectable epinephrine in case you accidentally eat a food to which you are allergic. Homemade items do not have ingredient lists and can be contaminated with trace amounts of allergenic foods through contact with storage containers, baking sheets and utensils.
8. Remind family members and friends that strict avoidance is the only way to manage food allergies

and even one little bite can hurt.

9. If visiting relatives' homes who have pets, take medication before arriving to minimize a possible reaction.
10. The holidays can be a very stressful time of year. Pay attention to your stress level, which can sometimes lead to an asthma attack.
11. Ask your relatives and friends to avoid burning wood in the fireplace. The smoke can trigger an asthma attack.
12. When traveling away from home, take your own pillow with an allergen-proof cover and request down-free pillows if staying in a hotel.

## Onset of winter triggers coincides with increase in hospitalizations

**WV Asthma Hospitalizations by Month of Discharge, 2003**



### In 2003 ...

- 3,471 hospital discharges with a primary diagnosis of asthma occurred among WV residents.
- The number of discharges was lowest in the summer and highest in the fall, early winter and spring.
- Discharges resulting from asthma complications were highest among children (aged 0-15) in September (112 cases, 13.3%) and among the elderly (aged 65+, 14.8%) in December (131 cases).

Source: UB-92 Billing Data, WV Health Care Authority; WV Health Statistics Center, 2005.

Notes: Totals include hospital discharges with a primary diagnosis of asthma (ICD-9-CM 493) among WV residents. Totals represent the number of hospital discharges (individuals may be hospitalized multiple times).

## Preventing asthma episodes during winter sports activities

Cold air and exercise are both asthma triggers and can pose a big problem for outdoor winter-sports enthusiasts, who have asthma.

Strenuous exercise in cold dry air should be avoided, especially if your asthma isn't properly controlled; cold dry air can dry out the bronchial airways and trigger an asthma episode.

Swimming in an indoor heated pool is recommended as a safe way for people with asthma to exercise in the winter. The warm humid air will not cause the airways to spasm, as cold air does.

However, for those whose asthma is under control and there's no keeping you out of the cold, there are preventative measures that can be taken to reduce the chances of having an exacerbation while engaging in winter fun.

Here are some strategies for avoiding asthma symptoms due to outdoor activity in cold weather:

- Use your broncho-dilator inhalers, such as albuterol, 20 minutes prior to exercise, even if you are feeling fine and think you don't need it.
- Be sure to warm-up and cool-down after strenuous exercise.
- Keep your rescue medication with you at all times while exercising in cold air.
- Place your inhaler in an inside coat pocket to keep it warm and to avoid a cold aerosol spray, which can cause bronchial tubes to spasm.
- Wear a scarf or facemask over your mouth and nose to warm and humidify the air you breathe.
- Dress in layers to retain body heat and help keep airways warm.
- Stay hydrated to prevent the airways from drying out. Your body will sweat more than you realize while being active in cold weather.
- Avoid any sport or activity that is too strenuous for your level of physical conditioning.



## West Virginia Asthma Coalition

*Helping West Virginians with Asthma Breathe Easier*

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### School Bus Idling and Your Child's Asthma

In West Virginia, 210,000 students ride the school bus. Diesel exhaust from idling school buses can accumulate on and around the bus and pose a health risk, particularly to children. The Environmental Protection Agency and the American Lung Association rank diesel exhaust among the air pollutants that pose the greatest public health risk. Exposure to diesel exhaust can cause lung damage and exacerbates asthma and existing allergies. What can be done about it?

#### "Reduce Idling" Policy

The West Virginia Department of Education has a policy in place to reduce idling problems near schools. It regulates the school buses idling by stating:

- ✚ **In normal weather, a school bus operator shall not idle the bus while waiting for or loading students.**
- ✚ **Buses will be allowed to idle when the temperature is 40 degrees F. or colder, when needed to defrost driving windows, when the safety comfort of the students is in question, or when emergency dictates.**
- ✚ **School bus operators are prohibited from idling the buses for more than 10 minutes unless defrosting windows and then idling shall be limited to thirty minutes**

#### What Can We Do to Protect Our Children?

As parents and teachers, we need to make our principals and bus drivers aware of the policy and make certain they adhere to it. Encourage other parents to follow the "no idling" rules too. In addition to reducing school bus idling, following at least three car lengths behind a vehicle with visible exhaust or noticeable odor can reduce the health risks associated with vehicle exhaust.

**The West Virginia Asthma Coalition in conjunction with the American Lung Association encourages you to be aware of asthma triggers that are more common during the fall and winter months at home and at school. To find out more, go to [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org), or for more information on diesel emissions visit the Environmental Protection Agency website at [www.epa.gov/ne/eco/diesel](http://www.epa.gov/ne/eco/diesel).**

## Diesel school bus exhaust can trigger exacerbations in students with asthma

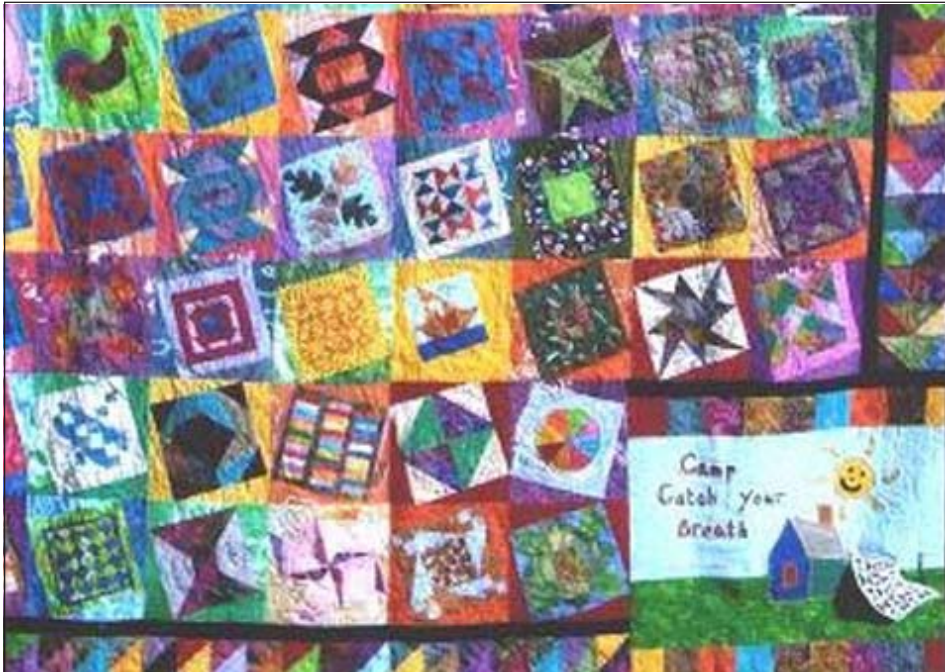
The West Virginia Asthma Coalition (WVAC) created the flyer, shown above, in an effort to promote awareness of the school bus idling policy in West Virginia and the effects of diesel exhaust fumes on children with asthma.

Diesel exhaust is an asthma trigger that is more prevalent in the winter, due to the idling of diesel fueled vehicles in cold weather.

An asthma exacerbation can be life-threatening; reducing asthma triggers in an environment where children with asthma are present, is vital to their well-being.

For more information about the Reduce Idling policy or to obtain copies of this flyer, contact Kelli Caseman, American Lung Association of West Virginia program manager at (304)342-6600.

# Camp Catch Your Breath hand-made quilt on display



The American Lung Association of West Virginia held its fifteenth annual Camp Catch Your Breath event, at Jackson's Mill in Weston, W.Va, August 1-5.

Campers, age 7 - 13, all had a hand in creating this one of a kind quilt during the week-long residential camp for kids with asthma.

The quilt (shown here) won second place in the Stonewall Jackson Arts and Crafts Jubilee and is now being displayed in these locations throughout the state:

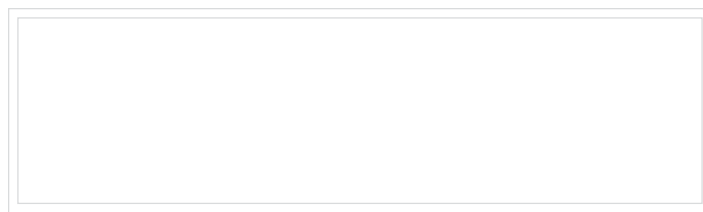
- Dec. 12 - Jan. 20: Camden Clark Memorial Hospital in Parkersburg
- Jan. 30 - March 10: Ohio Valley Medical Center in Wheeling
- March 20 - April 28: Jefferson Memorial Hospital in Ranson
- May 8 - June 16: Cabell Huntington Hospital in Huntington
- June 26 - Aug 4: United Hospital Center in Clarksburg

## A DDRESSING ASTHMA S TRATEGICALLY T HROUGH H EALTH I NITIATIVES AND M ANAGEMENT A LTERNATIVES

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