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Health and Safety E-News for Caregivers and Teachers

Welcome to the August 2007 issue of the American Academy of Pediatrics Health and Safety E-News for caregivers and teachers.

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This issue includes information and action steps for you on the following topics:

- [Managing Asthma](#)
- [Asthma Triggers](#)
- [How to Respond to an Asthma Attack](#)

Asthma makes it hard for children to breathe. At least 1 out of 10 children have asthma. Usual symptoms of asthma include coughing, wheezing, tightness of chest, and shortness of breath - these symptoms can happen at the same time or alone. While asthma can be life threatening, it can be controlled with proper care and/or medicine. Caregivers and teachers should know how to care for children with asthma.

Managing Asthma

- If a doctor or parent says a child has asthma, you can work together with the family and doctor to develop a [care plan](#) (or Asthma Action Plan). This plan will help you understand what the child needs and what you should do if he has an asthma attack. The plan should include:
 - A list of "triggers" or things that might cause symptoms and how to avoid them.
 - Any medicines the child takes and if, when, and how you should give them.
 - Other special instructions from the child's parents or doctor.
- Children with asthma can usually do the same things as other children (like exercise and go outside). Since weather can make asthma worse in some children, you should watch children closely when it is very hot or very cold. You may want to keep children with asthma inside when the [local authorities](#) post an alert and say the [air quality](#) is at an unhealthy level. Also, a child with asthma should be watched more closely when he is physically active. If a child gets worse when he goes outside or exercises, his parents should be asked to check with their child's doctor.
- Let parents know when you think their child needs to use his medicine or if you think he has new triggers.
- Keep a child's medications and equipment to manage the child's asthma close by so you can get to them quickly.
- Check expiration dates on the medication and be sure to inform parents when the medication supply is starting to get low.

Asthma Triggers

Asthma triggers are things that bring on an asthma attack. Children have different triggers, and some children do not have any known triggers. Common triggers are: pets, dust, bugs, pollen, mold, grass, tree or flower buds, foods, smoke, paint fumes, cleaning materials, and perfumes, or changes in temperature. Sometimes, a breathing problem or an asthma attack happens when a child is exercising. Often, asthma attacks happen when the child has a respiratory infection. Helping children avoid their own triggers is a way to prevent asthma attacks and improve their health.

Here are some things you can do to help the children in your care:

- Develop a schedule or plan that includes different physical activities throughout the day.
- Decrease things that attract dust and triggers (carpets, stuffed animals, cloth curtains, extra bedding, and dress-up clothes that can't be washed).
- Keep the rooms where children spend time clean. Vacuum the carpets and furniture when the children are not present.
- Reduce mold by quickly fixing leaky plumbing or places where there is standing water.



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- Do not allow the use of perfumes, fragranced lotions, scented cleaning products, or other items with scents.
- Do not allow pets with fur or feathers in the program. Get rid of bugs and pests.

How to Respond to an Asthma Attack

Quick and proper attention during an asthma attack is important. Here are some things you can do if a child you are caring for has an asthma attack:

- Know how to use asthma equipment like inhalers with spacers, peak flow meters, and nebulizers. (See resources for more information)
- If you think a child is having breathing problems, keep them relaxed by staying calm and helping to calm other children who are present.
- When an attack happens, remove the child from any known triggers. Begin treatment right away, following the instructions provided by the child's doctor as described in the child's care plan. A child should not have to wait to begin treatment until a parent can arrive to give it.
- Know ahead of time which children take medicine for asthma. It is important to know when to give the medicine, how much to give, and what to do if the asthma gets worse.
- Call 911 right away if the child has:
 - Severe breathing problems – he struggles to breathe, or his skin sucks in at his neck or under his rib cage when he breathes.
 - Difficulty talking or walking.
 - Peak flow is less than 50% of normal.
 - Blue lips or fingernails.
- Call the child's parents if:
 - Symptoms continue after 1 dose of medicine has been given.
 - The peak flow reading is less than 80% of normal after medicine is given.
 - Symptoms are severe (see above).

For resources on Asthma, visit the [Resource Library](#).