

# Asthma management for schoolchildren

In Australia, asthma affects up to one in 6 children. Asthma is a common reason for children being admitted to hospital and is a frequent cause of children missing school.

However, schools are now becoming more aware and better prepared when it comes to asthma. Australia's Federal Government launched an Asthma Friendly Schools programme in 2000. At the time of writing, just over half the schools in Australia were registered as 'asthma friendly'.

Asthma-friendly schools actively support the whole school community in the management of asthma.

Criteria for accreditation as an Asthma Friendly School

- ▶ The school health curriculum includes an asthma education programme.
- ▶ All school staff are educated about asthma.
- ▶ Asthma records are kept in a central location for each student with asthma.
- ▶ Asthma First Aid posters are displayed.
- ▶ Asthma medicines are readily available to students with asthma.
- ▶ At least one spacer device is available.
- ▶ There is a plan for managing asthma during school sporting activities, excursions or camps.
- ▶ Asthma education is offered to parents/carers within the school.

Recommended features

- ▶ Potential asthma triggers should be kept to a minimum within the school environment.
- ▶ The school is encouraged to join its local Asthma Foundation as a community member.

## How can I help my child?

Unfortunately, many children remain reluctant to use their puffers at school — it's just not 'cool'. So what can the parent of a reluctant child with asthma do?

Firstly, see your child's doctor or specialist for an individualised written asthma action plan that takes into account any special needs that your child has.

Then use this checklist as a guide to help your child cope with their asthma at school — you may need to do more than the advice listed here, depending on the severity of your child's asthma. Consult your doctor to help you compile a checklist specifically for your child.

- ▶ Ensure that the school, and your child's teacher in particular, know of your child's asthma.
- ▶ Give the teacher and/or school nurse a copy of your child's asthma action plan along with a spare inhaler that is labelled with your child's name and instructions for use.
- ▶ Provide the teacher/nurse with your contact details.
- ▶ Make sure your child always carries their medicine, and knows who to go to in case of an attack at school and where the spare inhaler is kept.
- ▶ Be aware of possible triggers in and around the school.
- ▶ Ensure you have spare asthma kits available at home or work or kept in the car in case of emergency.

Also remember that being exposed to tobacco smoke can make your child's asthma worse. If you are a smoker, you can help improve your child's asthma by quitting. Aim for a smoke-free home, and talk to your child as they get older about how they can keep healthy by remaining a non-smoker.

## Asthma and school sport

Exercise is important for children's health, even though it can trigger asthma symptoms. Seek your doctor's advice if your child is getting a tight chest, breathlessness, cough or wheeze when they exercise. A thorough assessment is important to see whether asthma is causing the symptoms — if it is, your doctor can suggest ways to help control your child's asthma.

With an increasing number of high-profile athletes speaking out about having asthma, sport and exercise are actively being encouraged for children with asthma. This will help make these children less self-conscious about managing their asthma in public and encourage them to keep healthy and active.

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