

Asthma

Asthma is a common condition which affects the small air passages (bronchi) of the lungs. These passages become swollen and inflamed, and this leads to the production of mucus (fluid). During an asthma attack, these small airways become narrow. This reduces the flow of air in and out of the lungs. This may lead to wheezing, coughing and difficulty with breathing. Not all children who have asthma will wheeze or cough.

Asthma attacks can be controlled

An asthma attack can be controlled with medication. Asthma is an illness that comes and goes at different times. Most children with asthma will have an occasional attack, while a few will have symptoms every day.

Asthma is triggered by different things

Asthma tends to run in families. It is also associated with other conditions such as eczema, hayfever and allergies. Asthma is triggered by different things for different children. Some common triggers are:

- Colds
- Changes in the weather
- Cigarette smoke
- Dust and dust mites
- Pollen
- Some animals.

Coughing is a symptom

Wheezing and coughing are common symptoms of asthma. Coughing is most likely to happen:

- At night
- During the early hours of the morning
- In cool weather
- During exercise.

Asthma can be controlled with treatment

Asthma can be well controlled with the appropriate medication in almost all children. With treatment and proper management, almost all children with asthma can play sports, enjoy leisure activities and lead active lives. The medicines work by either opening the narrow airways or preventing them from narrowing in the first place. The two common types are:

- **Relievers** - quick acting and used during an attack to open the airways (such as Bricanyl, Respolin and Ventolin).
- **Preventers** - slow acting and used to prevent an attack from occurring (such as Becotide, Intal and Pulmicort).

It also helps to avoid known triggers.

Your doctor can help with medication and advice

Your doctor will prescribe the correct medication and explain how to use it. Asthma medication may not work if it has not been taken correctly.

Ask your doctor for an asthma action plan. This shows how to prevent asthma and manage the attacks. If a child has asthma, it's a good idea to give copies of the plan to the school and to anyone else who looks after the child.

What to do during an asthma attack

When your child coughs and wheezes due to asthma, give reliever medication two to three times over a few minutes - then every three to four hours if needed.

If this does not control the symptoms, see your doctor or go to a hospital emergency department.

Call an ambulance in an emergency

Call an ambulance when your child:

- Finds it very difficult to breathe.
- Is unable to talk or is turning blue.
- While waiting for the ambulance, you should give your child reliever medication every one to two minutes.

Where to get help

- See your doctor if you suspect asthma.
- Always call an ambulance (dial 000) immediately if someone has trouble breathing during an attack.
- Royal Children's Hospital Tel. 9345 5522
- The 24 Hours Maternal and Child Health Telephone Service Tel. 13 22 29. (For the cost of a local call throughout Victoria.)
- Asthma Victoria Tel. 1800 645 130

Things to remember

- The common signs of asthma are coughing and wheezing.
- Different triggers bring on asthma in different people.
- Asthma can be controlled with reliever and preventer medication.
- See your doctor if your child does not respond to reliever medication.
- Find out more about asthma and its treatment to help you feel more confident to look after your child.

Want to know more?

For references, related links and support group information, go to More information.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:



DHS - Office for Children

More Information

All Better Health Channel fact sheets have links to further information. If you want more information on this topic, please visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au and use the search bar at the top of any page to find extra information on this topic.

Updates

This is a copy of a fact sheet from the Better Health Channel website. Fact sheets on the Better Health Channel are updated regularly. For the most recent information on this topic, go to www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Quality assurance

This fact sheet, like all fact sheets on the Better Health Channel, has passed through a rigorous and exhaustive approval process.

Copyright

Copyright © 2000/2004 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with Permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorized reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.