

Asthma Information Sheet

Asthma is a chronic disease that inflames and narrows the airways of the lungs. When a person breathes, air passes through the nose and down the throat into the lungs. Asthma causes the airways to swell and become inflamed, which makes them sensitive to triggers. Asthma triggers vary from person to person, and can include a cold or flu, pollen from trees and plants, pet dander, dust, chemicals and smoke.

An asthma episode or attack is an event in which asthma symptoms flare up or intensify, requiring immediate treatment to get symptoms under control. Episodes may occur suddenly, with few warning signs, or build slowly over a period of hours or days.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary among individuals, but may include coughing, tightness or pressure in the chest or itching of the neck/throat/ears. Wheezing is the whistling sound made when air moves through narrowed or tightened airways. It is a classic symptom of asthma.

Treatment

Removing asthma triggers from the environment can decrease the number of attacks. Move smoking outside. Remove quilts, upholstery and rugs from classrooms. Schedule outdoor activity for times when air pollution levels will be low. Keep humidity levels low to prevent mold. Use safe cleaning products without dangerous chemicals. Prevent buses and trucks from idling near children and open windows.

Educational Implications

An asthma action plan outlines a student's treatment.

Some students may have frequent absences. These can be due to illness, recovery from an asthma episode and doctor visits for treatment.

Exercise modifications may minimize a student's asthma symptoms and episodes.

Asthma symptoms and attacks may affect sleep, which may decrease alertness.

Some students use an inhaler to open airways to help ease breathing. A student may carry the inhaler or use it in the school health office. Check your district's policy.

Nebulizers are small portable machines used by some students to deliver asthma medications. These treatments usually take 10-15 minutes in the school health office.

Educational Options

Those students whose asthma adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.