



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

## Facts About Asthma

JAMES L. SEWARD August 12, 2010

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As the summer months begin to fade away and the back to school season approaches, many children will be ramping up their level of physical activity. Some may be returning to sports or joining an athletic team for the first time while others may be looking forward to physical education class or simply rejoining their friends on the school playground. No matter how intense the participation, as youngsters get back into the swing of things, it is important to watch for signs for the chronic condition of asthma.

Asthma is a serious, sometimes life-threatening respiratory disease that affects the quality of life for millions of Americans. Slightly over 9 percent of children suffer from asthma, characterized by an inflammation of the lungs that restricts airways, causing shortness of breath, wheezing, and coughing. Other signs of asthma include rapid or noisy breathing, frequent bronchitis or pneumonia, and recurrent nighttime or early morning coughing. Sometimes the only clue is that a child cannot keep up with friends during physical exertion.

Asthma can be brought on by allergies, exercise, cold temperatures, infections or stress.

Asthma is not curable, but it can be managed through medical treatment and by avoiding harmful environmental factors that may trigger an attack. It is very important to minimize the inflammation of asthma since chronic inflammation weakens the lungs and can make them prone to chronic lung disease.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also recommends five important steps that can be taken to help avoid asthma attacks.

- Take it outside. One of the most common asthma triggers in the home is second hand smoke. Until they can quit, people should smoke outside, not in their home or car.
- Play it Safe. Ozone and particle pollution can cause asthma attacks. People should watch for the Air Quality Index (AQI) during their local weather report. When AQI reports unhealthy levels, they should limit outdoor activities.
- Dust mites are also triggers for asthma. For mite control, people should cover mattresses and pillows with allergen proof covers. They should wash sheets and blankets once a week in hot water.
- Stake your claim. Household pets can trigger asthma. People should keep pets out of the bedroom and off furniture.

- Break the mold. Mold is another asthma trigger. The key to controlling mold is controlling moisture. People should wash and dry hard surfaces to prevent and remove mold, and should replace moldy ceiling tiles and carpet.

Although it may prove difficult throughout the sticky months of summer, humidity levels in your house should be kept below 40 percent because the dampness increases the risks of asthma. Asthma sufferers should avoid camping and hiking during times of high pollen counts and refrain from strenuous activity when ozone levels are at their highest. If mold allergies trigger asthma attacks, then one should steer clear of barns, hay, raking leaves and mowing grass. Certain drugs, such as aspirin and products containing aspirin, can cause life-threatening asthma attacks in susceptible individuals. Doctors recommend the use of acetaminophen as an alternative to aspirin and aspirin-related products.

In New York, efforts are being made to better understand and track asthma. Under the asthma reporting law, hospitals are required to report the incidence of asthma among emergency room patients. Researchers hope this will help them get a better idea of when and where asthma attacks occur, with the goal of linking the disease to other environmental factors, such as weather and pollution levels. Ultimately, the law will help find ways to improve treatment for asthma sufferers, as well as create better asthma prevention strategies.

As with any medical condition, it is vital that you work with your doctor to create an asthma action plan. Whether for a child or adult, this is an important step. The plan should include things like asthma triggers, instructions for asthma medicines, what to do in case of an attack and emergency telephone numbers.

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