
Asthma Factsheet (for Schools)

What Teachers Should Know

Asthma is a lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. When someone has asthma, their airways are always a little inflamed (irritated and swollen), even when they have no symptoms. Sometimes their airways get even more inflamed and may fill with mucus. Muscles around the airways may tighten, causing narrowing.

Asthma is one of the main reasons that students miss school. There's no cure for asthma, but it can be managed so that kids and teens can live otherwise normal and healthy lives.

When asthma symptoms happen (called asthma flare-ups), students may need to make urgent visits to doctors' offices or the emergency room. During a flare-up, someone might have:

- wheezing
- coughing
- tightness of the chest
- trouble breathing
- fatigue (being very tired or sleepy)

Students with asthma may:

- need to take medicine that goes directly into the lungs (is inhaled) or is taken by mouth, usually in the school nurse's office
- feel jittery, anxious, or hyper as a side effect of asthma medicines
- need to take medicine before or during field trips if those places have triggers that could make their asthma worse
- request the removal of allergens in classrooms that can trigger flare-ups
- need to be excused from or modify phys-ed or other activities when they have flare-ups

Bullies often target students who seem "different," so having a health condition like asthma can put kids and teens at higher risk of being bullied.

What Teachers Can Do

Students with asthma may need special consideration regarding missed instruction, assignments, and testing when they miss class time due to flare-ups, going to the school nurse's office to take medicine, and visiting their doctors.

Keep in mind that students with asthma can (and should, as much as possible) participate in school sports, phys-ed, and other activities. Students who have exercise-induced asthma (EIA) may need to use their inhalers before doing physical activities. They might have to take other precautions to avoid flare-ups — check with your students' parents.

Most students with asthma have written instructions from their doctor (called an asthma action plan). The plan tells details how to prevent and manage flare-ups. You should know your students' asthma triggers and let them use their medicine when needed. They should be able to quickly and easily get the medicine they use for quick relief of symptoms, whether they're in school or at a school event.

You should know how to recognize and handle an asthma emergency (you may be the only adult around when a flare-up happens, or the student may not have an asthma action plan). If a student's symptoms get worse after they take medicine, call the school nurse or 911.

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