

Asthma and young children

It is estimated that approximately 15 per cent of Australian children have asthma. Asthma is one of the most common reasons for children being admitted to hospital and for missing days at school. If your child's asthma is well managed, they should be able to lead a healthy, active life.

Get the answers

There are many things to think about and plan for when your young child has asthma. It is important to learn as much as you can about the condition. Your doctor and pharmacist are there to help you.

What you need to know about your child's asthma

To manage your child's asthma effectively, you should know:

- **The pattern of asthma** – some children have only mild, occasional episodes or only show symptoms after exercising, with no symptoms between episodes. Some experience daily symptoms, while others have symptoms continuously which limits their physical activity. Each pattern of asthma requires a different treatment approach.
- **The risk of a severe attack** – an important point to remember is that children can have a severe and even life-threatening attack, even though they have mild or occasional asthma.
- **Your child's triggers** – every child's asthma is different. Your child will probably have several asthma triggers, and they can be very different from another child. Triggers cause inflammation or swelling in the airways and make asthma worse. The most common trigger is a viral infection, usually a simple cold. Find out what triggers your child's asthma so that you can avoid them.
- **Your child's asthma symptoms** – some of the common symptoms and signs include coughing (particularly at night), wheeze, shortness of breath, a feeling of tightness in the chest or difficulty breathing (a 'sore tummy'). Your child may have all of these symptoms or just a few.
- **Your child's asthma medications** – learn what the medications do and make sure your child takes them properly.
- **What to do if your child has an asthma attack** – know the Asthma First Aid.

Asthma action plan

An Asthma Action Plan is a clear, succinct written summary of your child's asthma management. Everyone with asthma should have a personalised asthma action plan written by their doctor.

An Asthma Action Plan outlines:

- How to care for day-to-day asthma (it lists your child's regular medications and how often they should take them)
- Key things to recognise when your child's asthma is getting worse or an 'attack' is developing, and the steps you should take to manage it
- Symptoms that are serious enough to need urgent medical help (with emergency information on what to do if your child has an asthma 'attack').

An Asthma Action Plan needs to be reviewed regularly.

The Asthma Action Plan is an important tool for anyone caring for your child. A second copy of the action plan should be sent to school, kindergarten, childcare centre, grandparents, other relatives or to anyone caring for your child.

What the children's service needs to know

To assist childcare and preschool workers in the care of your child with asthma, you should:

- Tell them that your child has asthma (even if it mild or occasional).

- Give them a copy of your child's Asthma Action Plan.
- Provide emergency numbers and the name of your child's doctor.
- Give them written authorisation to administer asthma medication to your child.
- Show them how to use the medication devices like pumps, spacers and puffers.
- Make sure your child has an up-to-date supply of medication at the centre.
- Notify them if your child's asthma changes.
- Tell the staff about any concerns you may have.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local pharmacist
- Asthma Foundation Victoria Tel. (03) 9326 7088 or 1800 645 130

Things to remember

- Asthma is the most common childhood condition in Australia.
- Your child needs a personalised Asthma Action Plan written up by their doctor and reviewed regularly.
- Make sure your children's service understands your child's asthma symptoms and medications.

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

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

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