

Thunderstorm asthma

Find out about thunderstorm asthma warnings, symptoms and treatment.
Be ready this grass pollen season.

What is thunderstorm asthma?

In Victoria, the grass pollen season usually runs from 1 October to 31 December. During this time, you may notice an increase in asthma and hay fever. The season also brings the chance of thunderstorm asthma.

Thunderstorm asthma can occur when there is a lot of grass pollen in the air and a specific kind of thunderstorm. Grass pollen grains get swept up in the wind and carried for long distances. Some can burst open and release tiny particles that are concentrated in the wind gusts that come just before a thunderstorm. These particles are small enough for people to breathe deep into their lungs and can rapidly trigger asthma symptoms, even in those who have never had asthma before.

When many people develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time during these conditions, it is known as epidemic thunderstorm asthma.

Who is at risk?

People at risk of thunderstorm asthma include those with **current or past asthma, undiagnosed asthma or springtime hay fever**. The risk is even higher for people who have both asthma and hay fever, especially if their asthma is poorly controlled.

Protect yourself this grass pollen season

You can protect yourself and those in your care by following these simple steps:

- Monitor the epidemic thunderstorm asthma risk forecast:
 - visit the [Vic Emergency thunderstorm asthma forecast webpage](#)
 - download the [VicEmergency app](#) via the AppStore or Google Play.
- Don't be outdoors in a thunderstorm, especially during the winds that precede it. Go inside and close your doors and windows. Turn off any air conditioner systems that bring air from outside into the home or car (including evaporative air conditioners).
- Take your preventative medication as directed.
- Know how to manage an asthma attack. Follow your asthma action plan or use asthma first aid.

Asthma

- **If you have asthma** – talk to your GP to check your asthma control, and review and update your asthma action plan to ensure you have the right asthma medication and to check you're using it properly. Remember, taking an asthma preventer as directed is crucial. It helps to prevent asthma symptoms, including thunderstorm asthma.
- **If you've ever had asthma** – talk to your GP about protecting yourself from the risk of thunderstorm asthma.
- **If you have had wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, or a persistent cough** – talk to your GP. They can help you find out if you have asthma and how to manage those symptoms.
- **Always carry your reliever medication** – this is your emergency asthma first aid medication.

For mild asthma symptoms, see your GP, speak with a pharmacist or access [other care options](#). If your condition is not improving or getting worse, call 000 or go to the hospital.

Hay fever

- **If you have springtime hay fever**, talk to your pharmacist or GP. They can help you create a hay fever treatment plan and suggest ways to protect yourself from thunderstorm asthma. This will include knowing where you can quickly get an asthma reliever puffer in case you develop thunderstorm asthma – these are available from pharmacies without a prescription.
- **If you develop asthma symptoms**, follow the steps of asthma first aid and make sure you follow up with your GP.
- **If you've experienced any asthma symptoms with your hay fever or you're not sure** – see your GP. Once a diagnosis is made you can get effective treatment that will make you feel and breathe better.

Asthma first aid

It's important for everyone in the community to know asthma first aid. Asthma first aid information is available from the [Better Health Channel](#), [Asthma Australia](#) and the [National Asthma Council Australia](#).

Call triple zero (000) immediately if:

- the person is not breathing
- their asthma suddenly becomes worse or is not improving
- the person is having an asthma attack and there's no reliever medication available
- the person is unsure if it is asthma
- the person is known to have anaphylaxis. If this is the case, **always give adrenaline autoinjector first**, and then reliever, even if there are no skin symptoms.

To access this information in other languages contact the [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#) on 131 450 (free call) and ask them to call [Nurse-on-Call](#).

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication impairment contact the [National Relay Service \(NRS\)](#) and ask them to call Nurse-on-Call.

Related information

- [Better Health Channel thunderstorm asthma webpage](#)

- [Thunderstorm asthma forecast](#)
- [Melbourne Pollen](#) website or app
- [Asthma Australia](#)
- [National Asthma Council Australia](#)

Where to get help

- **In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)**
- [Urgent care services in Victoria](#)