

Asthma: Easing the Wheezing



Kyle's preschool teacher notices that he often misses school because of colds. She hears a wheeze or whistling sound in his breath when he plays hard. Could he have asthma? Asthma causes the airways to swell, tighten, and fill with mucus. Asthma episodes can be life-threatening.

What are the warning signs of asthma in young children?

A child is more likely to develop asthma if a family member has asthma or allergies. Warning signs include

- frequent coughing, shortness of breath, or complaints of a tight feeling in her chest
- congestion with colds or colds that seem to last longer for him than for his siblings
- coughing or wheezing when she plays hard, laughs, or has a temper tantrum
- dark circles under his eyes

What factors might bring on an asthma episode?

Although the cause of asthma is unknown, some episodes are triggered by

- smoke, dust, or air pollution
- allergies, including those to pets, pollen, mold, grass, dust mites, and cockroaches
- strong odors such as paint fumes and perfume
- changes in temperature, particularly exposure to cold air
- exercise or strong emotions
- respiratory infections such as colds

What is the teacher's role?

If teachers suspect asthma, they can urge parents to contact their child's health care provider. For each child who has a history of asthma, teachers and caregivers can

- help the child avoid known triggers
- have an Individual Health Plan prepared by the child's parents, their health care provider, and the school staff
- respond calmly to mild episodes and use needed equipment or medications quickly

How would a teacher know if a child needs emergency help?

Call 911 if a child

- is struggling to breathe or if his skin is pulled into his neck or rib cage when he breathes
- can't walk or talk easily
- has a peak flow less than 50%, as measured by a peak flow meter
- has lips or nails that are blue or gray

The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this Tip Sheet are intended for information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with questions regarding their child's health or medical conditions.

For related Web resources, see "Asthma: Easing the Wheezing" at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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