

Asthma: Easing the Wheezing



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

What are the warning signs of asthma in young children?

- frequent coughing, shortness of breath, or complaints of a tight feeling in the chest
- chest congestion with colds or colds that seem to last longer than other children
- coughing or wheezing when the child plays hard, laughs, or has a temper tantrum
- inability to keep up with peers when running or playing because of trouble breathing

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 to pets, pollen, mold, grass, dust mites, and cockroaches
- strong odors such as paint fumes, cleaning products, 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

- obtain the child's asthma action plan prepared by the child's parents and their health care provider.
- help the child avoid known triggers
- respond calmly to mild episodes and quickly use needed equipment or medications
- make sure the child uses their rescue inhaler or nebulizer when they are showing the warning signs of asthma

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

Call 911 and the parent/guardian if a child

- is showing signs they are struggling to breathe, such as nose flaring or their skin is pulled into their neck or rib cage when breathing
- can't walk or talk easily
- 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.

This Tip Sheet was produced in collaboration with the Center for Food Allergy & Asthma Research (CFAAR) at Northwestern University: cfaar.northwestern.edu

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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