

# 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](https://cfaar.northwestern.edu)

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