

# Taking Care of your Child's Asthma

## What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease of the airways in the lungs. No one knows why some children get asthma and some do not. There is no cure for asthma, but it can be controlled.

Air travels in and out of our lungs through airways as we breathe. With asthma, the airways become very sensitive and swollen. This causes extra production of fluid. The muscles around the airways also tighten. All this makes it hard to breathe. When this happens it is called a flare-up.

## What are the symptoms of asthma?

- Shortness of breath — your child feels like he/she can't breathe fully.
- Tightness in the chest — your child feels like a strap is around his/her chest.
- Wheezing — a whistle sound when your child breathes out.
- Coughing lasting more than a week — a consistent cough, especially at night.

## How do I take care of my child's asthma?

- Know about triggers.
- Work with your child's doctor. You should find and stick with a doctor for regular asthma care.
  - ✓ Request an asthma action plan. This plan will help you know what to do for your child during a flare-up and what to do in an emergency.
  - ✓ Your child should take his/her medicines as prescribed. Make sure that you understand how and when to give the medicines. Ask questions! Your doctor wants you and your child to understand about the medicines.
  - ✓ If you want to use home remedies or an over-the-counter cold medicine, be sure to check with your child's doctor. Some traditional remedies may be helpful, but you should confirm this with the doctor.

## What kinds of medications does my child take for asthma?

There are two kinds of asthma medications. Your child may be given one or both kinds.

It is important not to mix them up, because they do different things in the body.

- Long-term controller (maintenance) — This kind of medicine helps to keep the airways from becoming sensitive and reduces the chance of a flare-up. A controller is used regularly, **even when your child feels good.** A controller helps to keep your child feeling well.
- Rescue medicine or quick reliever (short acting bronchodilator) — Even when taking a controller, there may be times when your child has a flare-up. Once a flare-up starts, a rescue medicine is needed to stop it. Also, they can help to prevent flare-ups caused by exercise or physical activity or play.

## What about Peak Flow Readings?

Children older than 5 years can usually use a peak flow meter. A peak flow meter measures the airflow in the lungs. Your child's asthma action plan will be based on his/her best air flow. A peak flow meter can actually point to a problem with the lungs before your child begins to show other symptoms.

One of the best things you can do for your child is to get educated about your child's asthma. Talk to your doctor about asthma education.

## What do I do about asthma at school or daycare?

There should be a plan for how your child will manage his/her asthma at school. The plan should be between you, your child, the teacher and the school nurse or principle/director. It should be based on the asthma action plan you get from your doctor.

### Parents'/Guardians' Role

- Give the school/daycare a copy of the asthma action plan. Some school districts have their own  asthma action plan to be filled out by the doctor. Be sure to get the doctor to fill it out and get it  back to the school.
- Provide a written list of your child's early warning signs of an asthma flare-up.
- Provide a written list of known triggers and other things your child should avoid. Be sure to  indicate if your child's asthma is triggered by exercise or playing hard. If your child does gym or  sports, make sure the coach/gym teacher is in on the plan for what to do in the event of a flare-up.
- Give the school a list of medicines taken and when they should be given. Also include whether  the medicines have any side effects for your child. Some children may need to have medicines at  school. Work with the school to make sure your child can either carry their medicines or that they  are stored at school in a place that is easy to get to.

### Keep your child at home if he/she has these signs:

- Infection, sore throat, swollen or painful neck.
- Fever over 100 degrees.
- Wheezing or coughing that lasts after taking medicine.
- Hard time breathing or very fast breathing.
- Abnormal peak flow readings. Follow your asthma action plan guidelines.

