



# Helping Students Manage **ASTHMA**

## About Asthma

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease characterized by a reversible narrowing of the airways. Symptoms commonly experienced during an asthma attack include **shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, coughing and difficulty speaking in full sentences.**

Asthma affects the quality of life for an estimated 7 million children and is one of the primary causes of school absenteeism in the country.

Statically, in a Montana classroom of 30 students, about 2-3 students will have asthma.

About 40% of school-aged children in Montana reported missing. At least one school day in the last 12 months due to their asthma (DPHHS, 2013).

## About Rescue Inhalers

The typical inhaler you will see in schools are rescue (quick-acting) inhalers that propel the medication when the canister is depressed.

The inhaler delivers medication to the lungs causing the muscles of the respiratory tract to relax and open up, allowing greater airflow.

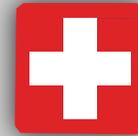
MT state law, MCA 20-5-420, allows students who have a Medication Authorization form on file with the school to carry and self-administer their rescue asthma medication. Rescue inhalers work best when used with a spacer device.

## Did You Know

Food allergies, exercise, exposure temperature changes and URI's may trigger an asthma attack. Common foods: Eggs, milk, peanuts, and wheat.

Montana Asthma Control Program offers **OPI Renewal Units** for staff and coaches and **FREE In-School Trainings.**

[dphhs.mt.gov/asthma/asthmafriendlyschools](http://dphhs.mt.gov/asthma/asthmafriendlyschools)



## Emergency Care

**IF CHILD IS EXPERIENCING SHORTNESS OF BREATH, COUGHING, OR WHEEZING:**

### Give Emergency Asthma Medication

Follow the individualized asthma action plan for the use of the rescue inhaler.

### Speak Calmly and Reassuringly

Help student to sit upright and relax. If symptoms persist after 10 minutes from medication administration, re-administer rescue inhaler.

### Seek help from school nurse or designated emergency staff IF

the Inhaler is not helping, breathing is hard and fast, nostrils are wide open, or the student cannot speak or walk well.

**Activate EMS by Calling 911** if any of the following occur: Lips, fingernails, or skin is blue or gray; student is too short of breath to walk or talk normally; there is no relief from medication 15-20 minutes from first dose; if nostrils flare open and neck muscles become visible with each breath; they are hunched over and struggling to breath.

**Notify parent (caregiver) and primary healthcare provider**

## For More Information

[www.epa.gov/asthma](http://www.epa.gov/asthma)

[www.dphhs.mt.gov/Asthma](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/Asthma)

# The Classroom Environment

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## TIPS FOR TEACHERS:

Identify your students with asthma and be familiar with triggers by communicating with the child/parent and reviewing their healthcare plan.

Ensure the substitute teacher is aware of the students in your classroom who have asthma.

Asthmatic children are more sensitive to cold weather conditions. Monitor children for respiratory changes and allow indoor recess if possible.

Cleaners have been known to irritate respiratory tracts in asthmatic children. Try to use only ONE type of cleaner in your classroom, and limit use to when children are not in the room when possible.

Be aware of activities or celebrations in your classroom that may trigger allergies, such as science projects, show and tell, field trips, etc.

Notify school administrator or school nurse if absences due to asthma are frequent.

## WAYS TO REDUCE TRIGGERS:

### Tobacco and Wildfire Smoke

- If smoke is present in the air, close windows and allow students to have indoor recess and lunch.

Dust



### Grass, Weeds, Pollen, Dust

- Keep windows closed during high pollen levels.
- Minimize clutter to maximize cleaning to reduce pollen and dust buildup.

### Respiratory Infections

- Be aware of students with respiratory illnesses, such as colds and allergies.
- Wash hands with soap and water regularly.

Grass and weeds



### Classroom Pets

- Avoid pets with fur or feathers due to longterm allergen presence.
- Position students with known animal allergies away from their location in the room.
- Consider having a pet-free classroom.

Chemical odors



### Strong Odors and Sprays

- Encourage staff to avoid strong perfume and cologne.
- Avoid using candles, incense, essential oils, and plug-in room fresheners.
- Avoid using strong scented markers, paints and adhesive products.