

**Back-To-School with Asthma:
Guide for Teachers**

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways caused by swelling and inflammation of the airway, lining, and tightening of the muscles around the airways, which block the flow of air through the lungs.

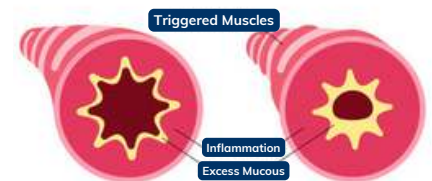
When asthma is well-controlled, student should be able participate in physical activities and remain symptom-free. However, when asthma is uncontrolled, it can lead to fatigue, increased absenteeism, decreased academic performance and in some cases, hospitalization and even death.

In Canada, approximately 12% of children live with asthma, making it the most common long-term respiratory disease among children in the country.

Does not have asthma



Has asthma



Every year, globally, an epidemic known as the "**September Asthma Peak**" occurs, typically during the third week of September, in which the highest number of asthma-related hospitalizations among children are recorded.

While it is crucial to ensure the safety of students with asthma throughout the entire school year, this time is particularly critical for ensuring those in your care living with asthma are kept safe.

What are asthma triggers?

Asthma triggers are things in the environment that cause worsening of asthma symptoms or asthma attacks. Common asthma triggers at school include:



Infections:
Colds, flu, RSV,
Covid



Allergens:
Pollen, dust mites,
mold, pets/pet
dander



Irritants:
Industrial smoke,
strong odors,
pollution, wildfire
smoke



Weather:
Cold air, changes
in weather



Physical Activity:
Exercise, especially
in cold or dry air

What medication is used to treat asthma symptoms?

Reliever Medication:

Reliever medication (usually blue in color) is used to relieve asthma symptoms when they occur. They are used to stop asthma attacks and should **be always available to children in case asthma symptoms occur** as without this medication, a child's asthma can continue to worsen which can potentially be fatal.



In 2012, a young boy named Ryan from Ontario, tragically lost his life to an asthma attack at school because his reliever inhaler was not readily available. In response to this tragedy, legislation (Ryan's Law and Policy/Program Memorandum 161) was enacted to ensure that every school in Ontario guarantees that children with asthma have access to their reliever inhalers at all times.

Learn more about Ryan's Law: <https://ontario.ca/page/supporting-students-medical-conditions>

As a teacher, what are some basic steps I can do to ensure students with asthma in my care remain safe?



Know what students in your care are living with asthma and request a copy of their Asthma Action Plan from their parent/guardian - this written document will help you identify when the student's asthma is well and when you should seek help. It also lists the steps you should take if they are having an asthma attack.



Know how to recognize when an asthma attack is happening and the steps you should take during one.



Ensure all students with asthma have access to their reliever (rescue) inhaler at all times.



Approximately 85% of asthma exacerbations in children are caused by respiratory infections. Encouraging students to ensure their hands are clean, using proper handwashing technique is one of the most effective ways of preventing an asthma attacks. (Use hand sanitizer if available).

How do I recognize worsening asthma symptoms?

Common early signs of an asthma attack:	Common life threatening symptoms of an asthma attack:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coughing • Wheezing • Fatigue • Inability to exercise without breathing issues • Restless, irritable and/or quiet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble breathing • Excessive coughing or wheezing • Chest tightness • Shortness of breath • Lips or hands turning blue • Cannot finish sentences • Skin or neck or chest sucked in with each breath

What should I do in an asthma attack?

