



Asthma and Athletics

Have an Asthma Action Plan

All asthmatics should have an asthma plan. It's especially important for a child whose asthma is aggravated by exercise to have a management plan on file at his or her school. Through teamwork with school personnel, families and healthcare providers, it is possible for a child with asthma to have normal endurance and even excel in athletics.

Teacher Education

Teachers and coaches need to be aware of common school problems faced by the student with asthma, such as:

- Absences due to asthma symptoms or doctor visits
- Avoidance of school or activities
- Not taking medications because it is bothersome to go the nurse's office
- Side effects that interfere with performance or concentration

They should also know the early warning signs of asthma episodes, such as:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath or rapid breathing
- Chest tightness
- Fatigue (The child may slow down, stop playing, become easily irritated.)
- Complaining (The young child may say that his/her chest "hurts" or "feels funny.")
- Avoidance (Older children may avoid certain activities, e.g., sports, sleepovers.)

It's also important for school personnel to know how to treat an asthma episode. Teacher, coaches and school personnel should be familiar with the following:

- What medications the student uses, and how they are used
- When to contact the physician or the emergency room
- Common side effects of asthma medications that warrant communication with the parents and/or physician: nervousness, nausea, drowsiness, jitteriness, hyperactivity.

Asthma Management Plan

Each student should have an asthma management plan that provides the following information to help teachers and other school personnel know how to assist the student:

- What causes and what aggravates the student's asthma.
- How to minimized exposure to these causing and aggravating factors (such as, allergens, strong odors) in the classroom and school environment that can worsen the student's asthma.
- How the student premedicates to prevent exercise-induced symptoms (and symptoms from other “anticipated” exposure; such as, allergens, cold air).
- Whether the student has physician and parent approval to carry and use his/her inhaler(s).
- Phone numbers for the physician, the parents, and the emergency room.
- What to contact the doctor or emergency room
- How to use devices to deliver asthma medications, spacers/holding chambers
- How to use a peak flow meter (if appropriate)

Physical Education Teachers and/or Coaches

The plan should also give the physical education teacher and/or coach specific written instructions, including:

- An explanation of exercise-induced asthma
- Which medications are used to prevent exercise-induced asthma and how to use them
- Other techniques to prevent exercise-induced symptoms (e.g., warm-up period)
- Warning signs of an asthma episode
- A copy of the School Asthma Management Plan

Children must be encouraged to participate in normal activities as much as possible. This team effort will help create a positive, healthy and safe environment for the child – both in and out of school – and ensure optimal care.

*Adapted from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology