

Health Bulletin

What You Should Know About Treating And Preventing Asthma

(NAPSA)—More than 17 million Americans have asthma, a chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes difficulty in breathing, and may require daily treatment to prevent and control.

Fortunately, learning more about this disease, what causes it and how to treat it, may help to prevent and minimize asthma attacks.

Asthma symptoms are usually caused by something in the environment or some action that irritates the lungs—known as a “trigger.” There are many kinds of triggers, and they vary from person to person. Asthma attack triggers can include allergens, changes in weather, cigarette smoke and anxiety.

When an asthma attack occurs, the bronchial tubes tighten and become swollen, and the secretion of mucus in narrowed airways increases. Symptoms of an asthma attack include shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and tightness in the chest.

A family history of asthma increases a person’s chances of developing the disease. In addition, more than 80 percent of people with asthma are allergic to one or more allergens. Allergic rhinitis, or hay fever, is a potent trigger of asthma attacks in people with both allergies and asthma.

People should consult a health care provider if they have a family history of asthma and/or notice symptoms of the disease, such as frequent coughing or wheezing.

Becoming educated about the disease and its triggers can help people who suffer from asthma better control their attacks and may make them occur less frequently.

Fast Facts On Asthma

- More than 17 million Americans are estimated to have asthma
- More than 5,300 deaths per year are attributable to adult asthma
- Asthma cases have risen 75 percent since 1980, particularly among African-Americans and poor, inner-city populations
- Total cost of the disease is \$3.39 billion per year
- Emergency room visits and hospitalizations account for \$1.1 billion spending per year.

Sources: American Lung Association®, MSNBC



Asthma triggers to be aware of include:

- Smoke (cigarettes, wood fires and other heaters)
- House dust (vacuuming, dusting)
 - Exposure to animals or animal products (dogs, cats, birds, mice/hamsters, feather pillows)
- Strong emotions (laughing, crying)
 - Mold or mildew (bathroom molds, wet leaves, house plants, damp wood)
- Chemical odors/sprays (wet paint, perfume, hair spray, powders, cooking odors)
- Pollen (cut grass, trees, flowers)
- Illness (cold, flu, sore throat, ear infections)
 - Medications (aspirin, beta-blockers, eye drops)
- Changes in weather (air pressure, humidity, wind, heat and cold air)
 - Vigorous exercise (running, biking, playing ball or other sports)

To better manage this chronic disease that requires continuous management and treatment, a new experimental health care initiative in Florida, called “Florida: A Healthy State,” has been designed to educate people about a variety of health issues, including asthma.

The initiative is a collaboration between Florida’s Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and the pharmaceutical company Pfizer.

The program makes the best use of the resources and expertise of major medical centers, federally qualified health centers and physicians across the state. The program uses state-of-the-art software to track and coordinate patient care and provides specialized health care services. Ultimately, the goal is to expand this innovative program to other states across the country.

In collaboration with a “care manager,” people with asthma can learn to control the disease by keeping track of changes in symptoms and triggers, and engage in self-management activities such as monitoring peak flows.

Taking asthma medication as prescribed—even when feeling well—also is important, particularly before vigorous exercise or in the presence of other triggers. Lack of compliance with treatment recommendations can lead to acute events, hospitalizations and even death.

If you would like to learn more about asthma and whether the “Florida: A Healthy State” program is right for you, call 1-866-788-6767.

For additional information on asthma, contact your local American Lung Association of Florida office at 1-800-LUNG-USA.