Helpful Tips

- Reduce exposure to chalk dust.
- Choose low- or no-odor dry erase markers, paints and glues
- Fix moisture problems in classrooms, water fountains and bathrooms
- Eliminate dusty/musty/messy stacks of papers and books
- Do not allow any pets in classrooms
- Enforce no smoking rules
- Encourage young children allergic to dust mites to bring their own covers for sleeping mats or pillows
- Use only washable stuffed animals, and wash them weekly
- Encourage school to use integrated pest management (IPM) practices instead of pesticides
- Make sure students have up-to-date allergy and asthma action plans on file, along with necessary permission to carry and use emergency medications. Carry this information on school trips.
- Keep windows closed on days with high levels of pollen, mold or pollution

Steps to Asthma Control

1. Work closely with your health care team to understand, manage and prevent symptoms; keep all routine asthma visits.
2. Take all medicines as prescribed; know their names, when, how and why to use them.
3. Learn what things set off your asthma symptoms; avoid them as much as possible.
4. Treat asthma symptoms as soon as they appear, following your Asthma Action Plan.

Allergy & Asthma NETWORK

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Who We Are

Allergy & Asthma Network is the leading nonprofit patient outreach, education and advocacy organization for people with asthma, allergies and related conditions. Our patient-centered network unites individuals, families, health care professionals, industry and government decision makers to improve health and quality of life for millions of people affected by the conditions.

An innovator in encouraging family participation in treatment plans, Allergy & Asthma Network specializes in making accurate medical information relevant and understandable to all while promoting standards of care that are proven to work. We believe that integrating prevention with treatment helps reduce emergency health care visits, keep children in school and adults at work, and allow participation in sports and other activities of daily life.

Our Mission

To end unnecessary death and suffering due to asthma, allergies and related conditions through outreach, education, advocacy and research.

Allergy & Asthma Network is a 501(c)(3) organization.

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See our other brochures

Allergy & Asthma NETWORK

Breathe Better AT SCHOOL

Indoor air quality basics

Asthma is an ongoing lung disease that causes episodes of coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. Like all chronic illnesses, asthma cannot be cured, but you can prevent and ease symptoms. The key to asthma control is to stay away from the things that irritate your lungs. Most of these things are in the air we breathe.

Indoor allergens and irritants can cause itchy, watery eyes; sneezy, runny nose; sinus and ear congestion; headache; or fatigue. For people with asthma, they can spark coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing – and lead to a full-blown asthma attack.

Asthma is the leading chronic illness among children and youth in the United States and the principal cause of school absenteeism. Removing allergens, irritants and contaminants from the air inside the school will reduce student and staff allergy and asthma symptoms, along with need for medication or emergency treatment.

At the beginning of each school year and after vacations, parents should meet with teachers and school nurses to update the child's asthma action plan and check classrooms for potential asthma or allergy triggers.

Common allergens and irritants found in classrooms:

Dust mites

These tiny insects are found in upholstered furniture, naptime floor mats, pillows, stuffed toys and carpets. They feed off shed human skin wherever there is moisture to survive. Allergens from their dead bodies and waste collect in furnishings and dust then irritate airways and eyes on contact.

Solution:

- Have children with asthma or allergies bring their own washable covers for sleeping mats or pillows and take them home weekly for washing
- Minimize use of stuffed animals for children with asthma
- Choose classroom furniture padded with vinyl or other materials that are easily wiped down
- Be sure maintenance personnel vacuum carpets and keep window blinds free of dust

Pets

Cats, dogs and other furry or feathered animals shed animal dander -- tiny particles of protein from skin, saliva and waste that settle in carpets and dust. When disturbed, these allergens fly into the air and irritate eyes and lungs of sensitive people. No breed is truly "allergen free."

Solution:

- Do not allow any animals into the classroom

Mold

Mold grows in damp areas, both indoors and out, sending tiny spores flying through the air and into lungs. Some molds are toxic.

Solution:

- Check classrooms for leaky pipes or water damage and report to maintenance
- Store water and food overnight in sealed containers
- Do not keep potted plants in the classroom, as mold can grow on pots and in soil

Cockroaches and rodents

Allergens from insects and rodents settle in dust, carpets and furnishings, then fly into the air and lungs when disturbed. These pests need water and food to survive.

Solution:

- Fix leaky pipes or other sources of moisture
- Clean crumbs and food spills; keep food in sealed containers
- Enforce safe food handling and storage policies

Secondhand smoke

Secondhand smoke is dangerous. For people with asthma, especially young children, it can set off symptoms and cause long-term lung damage.

Solution:

- Enforce no-smoking policies for students and staff on school grounds

Germs and bacteria

Respiratory viruses and bacterial infections set off asthma symptoms in people of all ages.

Solution:

- Make sure students wash hands before and after eating and recess
- Encourage use of tissues for coughs and sneezes
- Ask students ill with colds or flu to stay home until healthy

Chemicals and strong odors

Perfume, air fresheners, scented dry-erase markers, paints and glues from art or science projects irritate lungs and set off asthma symptoms in students and staff.

Solution:

- Use low- or no-odor dry erase markers, art or science supplies
- Establish a "no perfume" classroom rule
- Skip the scented air fresheners and candles

Other airborne irritants

Chalk dust is an immediate irritant for anyone who breathes it, especially those with asthma.

Solution:

- Clean chalk boards and erasers when students are out of the room
- Seat students with asthma away from chalkboards