



Asthma Toolkit: Parents & Carers




1. Welcome

Welcome to this asthma toolkit aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people with the condition. The purpose of this toolkit is to ensure there is a more holistic and joined up approach to caring for young people with asthma. We are bringing together useful tools, guidance and information to help improve consistency of care and to share learning.

We are working hard to improve health and care in London. Read our asthma standards and ambitions for children and young people [here](#).

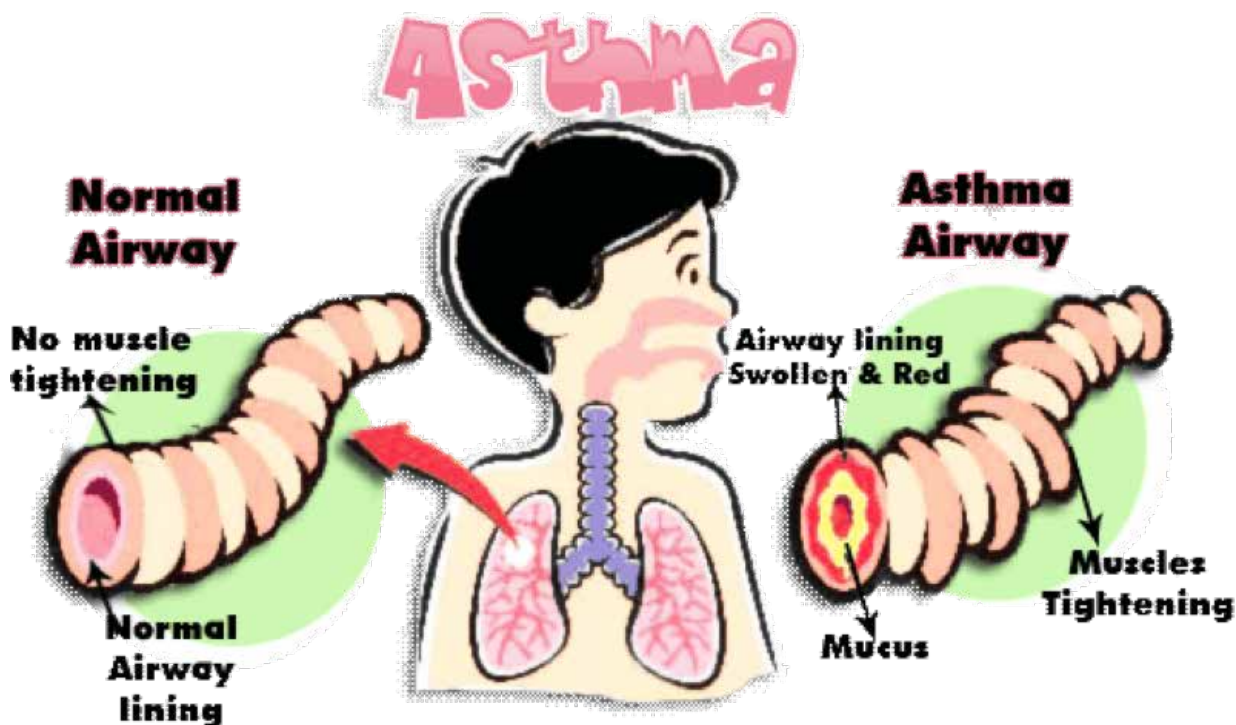
WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is an inflammatory disease that affects the lungs causing the airways to narrow making it difficult to breathe. Asthma can be distressing for you and your child as it may cause breathlessness, wheezing, coughing and chest tightness.

 **Watch this video** to learn more about asthma.

WHAT CAUSES ASTHMA?

It's not clear exactly what causes asthma, although it is likely to be a combination of factors. Some of these may be genetic. However, a number of environmental factors are thought to play a role in the development of asthma including air pollution. There is currently not enough evidence to be certain whether any of these can cause asthma, although a variety of environmental irritants, such as dust, cold air and smoke, may make it worse.



2. Caring for a child with asthma

It is important that you and your child understand asthma and the medicines prescribed to help control it. You may need to help your child make any necessary changes to their lifestyle.

Many things can make your child's asthma worse, but there are a number of things you can do to help manage the condition and prevent asthma attacks. An asthma attack can occur when you are exposed to things in the environment such as house dust mites and tobacco smoke. These are known as triggers. Triggers can be different for each child and it is important to identify what triggers their asthma.

Triggers

AIR QUALITY AND ASTHMA

A recent Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Child Health **report** found air pollution is linked to 40,000 deaths every year. There is mounting evidence air pollution may cause asthma, as well as triggering symptoms. The report also highlighted the issue of indoor air quality which includes kitchen products, faulty boilers, open-fires, use of spray deodorants, air freshener and scented candles.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Parents and young people can take a part to reduce pollutant exposure and triggers to help protect themselves. They can walk through parks away from the main road listen for pollution and pollen alerts and increasing their awareness of symptoms on days when it is high.

ALLERGENS

House dust mites, pets, mould and pollen can be a trigger for people with asthma. Pollen comes from trees, grasses and weeds and is spread by the wind and insects.

Further information on pollution and indoor environment available from **Asthma UK** or air quality alerts, weather and pollen count updates and advice are available.

Regular updates are available via a number of apps available on the app store. Air quality alerts, weather and pollen count updates and advice are also available from metoffice.gov.uk.

SMOKING

Try to avoid exposure to tobacco smoke as this may trigger symptoms. Smoking can significantly increase the severity and frequency of symptoms. Parents should not smoke indoors and children should not take up smoking. You are able to get support to stop smoking to help reduce exposure to the irritant effects. Parents and family should also be aware that smoking outside of the home can still mean that the cigarette particles that are on clothes may trigger asthma symptoms.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Never smoke indoors and try and get help to give up.



You can find your local **stop smoking service online** or call the free Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044.

EXERCISE

Exercise can trigger shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing or chest tightness in some people but this should not stop your child taking part in PE at school. Many athletes have exercise induced bronchoconstriction.



You can hear how athlete Paula Radcliffe deals with her asthma **here**.

It is important for children and young people with asthma to do physical activities that they can manage because being overweight can contribute to exacerbation of symptoms. A good measure is that your child should be able to keep up with their peers if their asthma is controlled.

VIRAL INFECTIONS

A cold, flu or other respiratory infections can make asthma worse. Having a flu injection each year may help. This may be available in schools for children in years 1 and 2, from your general practitioner or practice nurse or your local pharmacists. It is now available via nasal spray as well as in injection format from age four years.





 Further information about flu vaccination is available on the **NHS choices website**.

ALLERGIES

Allergies (which may include food, allergic rhinitis and eczema) and asthma often co-exist therefore recognition and avoidance of environmental exposure to allergens and smoke is important. Children need to learn to recognise if their asthma is getting worse, they can do this by telling you the following:

1. Are they using their reliever medication more than twice a week?
2. Is their asthma waking them at night?
3. Are they less able to do their regular activities such as sport?

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT ASTHMA TRIGGERS IS AVAILABLE AT:


-  **NHS Choices Triggers**
-  **British Lung Foundation children's lung conditions**
-  **Asthma UK Triggers**
-  **Itchy sneezy wheezy programme North West London**

EFFECT ON EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Asthma can cause stress and anxiety. If you are concerned that your child is struggling emotionally as a result of their asthma speak to your GP. Your child may be offered an assessment to see whether they need formal support to cope with the emotional effects of their asthma.

ASTHMA REVIEWS


All children and young people with asthma should have at least a yearly review, which is usually carried out either by their GP or practice nurse. An asthma review may also be done in hospital if your child is known to the asthma or allergy service. A review should also be held after every asthma attack to check whether changes are needed to their medication or care as an asthma attack is a sign that your child's condition may not be controlled.

 You can find out more about processes in the clinical asthma review section of this toolkit.


CHECKING HOW WELL YOUR CHILD'S ASTHMA IS CONTROLLED

The **Asthma and you website** can help you understand how well your child's asthma is controlled. Questions about your child's asthma will give you a score¹.

Parents and carers of children aged four to 11 can also use the Child Asthma Control Test. It also provides a score so you can see how well your child's asthma is controlled.

 There are similar leaflets in other languages available here.

You can also monitor your child's symptoms by using a symptom diary such as:

 **Monkey well being asthma symptom diary.**

If your child can do Peak Expiratory Flow measurements then you can also monitor their asthma control by using a **peak flow diary**.

DEVELOPING ASTHMA ACTION PLANS

An asthma action plan is a written plan that is developed with your doctor to help control you or your child's asthma. If your child has an asthma plan they are four times less likely to have an asthma attack that requires emergency hospital treatment. The asthma action should help you recognise when your child's symptoms are getting worse and give you advice on what to do.





THIS PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE INFORMATION ON:

- Triggers
- What the medicines do (preventers/and relievers)
- How and when to take treatment
- Current treatment
- How to spot asthma getting worse (symptoms and peak expiratory flow)
- What treatment to take in an emergency; how and when to call for help

It should be shared with your child's school and any activity clubs they are members of.



If your child doesn't have an asthma action plan, speak to your GP.

USEFUL TOOLS TO HELP YOU

-  Example asthma action plans are available on the **Asthma UK website**.
-  Monkey wellbeing is an easy to understand **website** for children.
-  Download the **under 7s asthma plan**
-  Download the **over 7s asthma plan** for the most suitable content.


USING ASTHMA INHALERS

It is essential that children and young people with asthma take their inhalers and medicines regularly to help control their asthma. If you are a parent or carer, make sure they take their preventer inhaler every day as prescribed. Children and young people should always use their inhaler with a spacer, this allows the most effective delivery of medication. Children and young people should use their reliever inhaler as needed. If they are using their reliever inhaler more often than usual, consider arranging a review with their doctor or nurse. A child or young person's inhaler technique should be assessed at every contact with a health professional.

-  More information on treatment and medication is available on **NHS Choices**.
-  Examples of how to use different spacers can be found on the **Asthma UK website**.

INHALER TECHNIQUES

Wessex Health Science Network has released a number of insightful videos and podcasts about using various inhalers.

-  You can view them on its **website**.

The pharmacy section of this toolkit also has lots of useful tips and information.

DEALING WITH ASTHMA ATTACKS

WHAT IS AN ASTHMA ATTACK?

An asthma attack happens when a child can't get enough air into their lungs, they may cough and wheeze. The checklist below will help you understand what is happening and what action to take.

SIGNS THAT YOU OR YOUR CHILD'S ASTHMA MAY BE GETTING WORSE:

- Do you have a cold, flu, runny nose or fever?
- Are you sneezing or have watery eyes?
- Are you wheezing or coughing, particularly at night?
- Are you sleeping well?
- Do you have a headache?
- Are you breathing faster than usual?
- Are you pale with dark circles under your eyes?
- Consider a review with your healthcare professional

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS HAVING AN ASTHMA ATTACK:

- Have they a tightness in their chest with difficulty breathing?
- Is your child restless?
- Are they using accessory muscles to breathe?
- Are they pale?
- Is there any blueish tinge on their lips or fingernails?
- Consider calling a doctor

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS HAVING AN ASTHMA ATTACK

- Stay with them and send someone to get their spacer and inhaler.
- Reassure your child and try to keep them calm.
- Sit them up and slightly forward.
- Spray one puff of their inhaler and then get them to take five breaths.
- Get them to repeat this up to 10 times if needed.
- If there is no improvement, call an ambulance.
- If the ambulance hasn't arrived and they are still short of breath repeat the steps above.

Having an asthma attack can be frightening and it is important that children and young people along with parents, friends and other family members know what to do in such situations. Anyone can panic when a child is having an asthma attack and therefore having posters in visible areas anywhere that children and young people with asthma may be could prove vital in an emergency.

Below is an example of a poster that can be printed and kept in an easily visible place such as the fridge door at home, GP waiting area and school office to remind individuals what they should do in the event that a child or young person is having an asthma attack.

The reminder below can be adapted for local use and also be commissioned to be fridge magnets, key rings, lanyards and posters.



Whittington Health developed this in conjunction with Islington CCG and UCL Partners.

Print off and keep this guide as it sets out what steps to take if your child has an asthma attack.



The Asthmanauts Comic Book is intended to help children with asthma learn more about their condition and how to use their inhalers. Parents and carers can help their child complete the comic book.



Another useful website is **monkeywellbeing.com**

ASTHMA EDUCATION AND RESOURCES

It is important that children and young people with asthma, and their families, understand the condition. Their doctor or nurse should provide information and support about asthma. Children and young people should receive regular asthma education, either in school or via their GP. A number of resources and support is available to parents and carers wanting to find out more about asthma and help their child learn understand their asthma.

Organisations & websites

Asthma UK

Get expert information and advice at [asthma.org.uk](https://www.asthma.org.uk)

Speak to an asthma nurse specialist on their helpline at 0300 222 5800

Follow Asthma UK on **Facebook** and **Twitter**

British Lung Foundation

Their website address is: [blf.org.uk](https://www.blf.org.uk)

You can call their helpline on 03000 030 555

You can follow them on **Facebook** or **Twitter**

NHS choices website

- Asthma in children video
- Advice about asthma treatment and medicines
- Living with asthma and self-care advice

The Wessex Academic Health Science Network website

- Owning My Asthma (14-19 year olds) – enhanced self-management online advice and information.

Educational and informative videos

-  Asthma UK
-  Asthma4children
-  My Asthma Log

National Institute for Health Research

- A community-based, participatory study into Multifaceted interventions for asthma (MIA) focusing on the use of a collaborative structured methodology tailored to the needs of children and families of South Asian origin has been published and is available on the journals library
- The MIA research team also developed a video to highlight the research findings

Other interesting online journals and research

- European Respiratory Society on paediatric asthma
- [ers-education.org](https://www.ers-education.org)
- Real First Aid; Understanding Asthma
- Asthma UK award winning materials
- My Asthma Toolkit based on my pain toolkit from Australia

References

¹ The website has been developed for use in the North Thames Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLARHC). The license has been donated to the CLARHC by Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK) as part of the GSKs industry partnership.