

# PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



Pinellas County Health Department

Steps to a HealthierFL-Pinellas County

## Attack Asthma

Asthma is a chronic lung condition that is described as causing difficulty breathing. People with asthma have sensitive airways. The airways may become narrow when they are irritated. This makes it difficult for the air to move in and out which can lead to wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Asthma is very common among children, teens, and adults.

Although this chronic lung condition can develop at any age, it is most common in childhood. Approximately 7-10 percent of children will get asthma, making it the most frequent chronic respiratory disease of children. It also accounts for 25 percent of school absenteeism. In the U.S., about 15 million people have asthma. Nearly five million of them are children.

Asthma is closely linked to allergies. Most, but not all, people with asthma have allergies. Children with a family history of allergy and asthma are more likely to have asthma. More boys have asthma than girls, but in adulthood, more women have asthma than men. Although asthma is a problem among all races, blacks have more asthma attacks and are more likely than whites to be hospitalized for them.

### Frequently Asked Questions

Is asthma contagious?

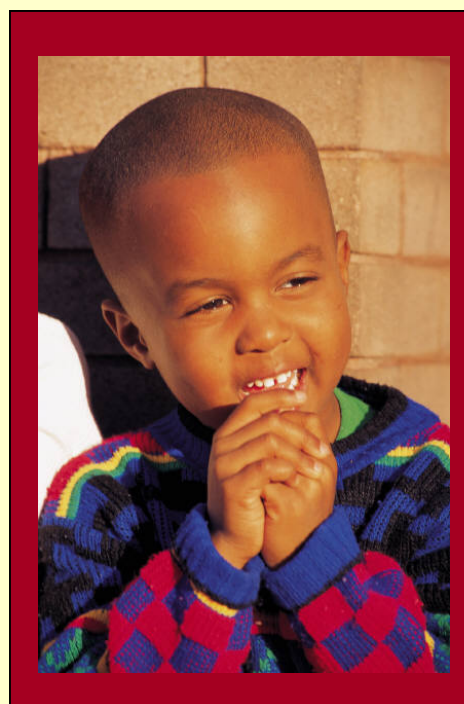
No, asthma is not a contagious condition--no one can "catch" it from you.

What are the most common causes of asthma attacks or episodes?

Many asthma episodes are brought on by asthma "triggers" which can include pet dander, dust mites, and respiratory infections such as cold and flu. Other triggers include second-hand smoke or breathing cold air. Some people, especially children, experience asthma as a result of exercise, and after running or playing hard if their asthma is not under control. Everyone is not affected by the same triggers.

My child has a lot of chest colds with coughing. Could it be asthma? Talk to your child's doctor about the colds and coughing. Some children who have a lot of colds with coughing, especially at night, do have asthma and should be treated for it.

Do babies who have wheezing when they have a cold ever "outgrow" their asthma? Many children who have wheezing as babies do not go on to have asthma as they get older. But other children continue to have asthma throughout childhood. Children with allergies or a family history of asthma are more likely to continue having asthma as they get older.



# Preventing Asthma Episodes



## Step 1: Talk to a Doctor

If your child has asthma or if you think your child may have asthma, take your child to a doctor. Your doctor will work with you to keep your child from having asthma episodes. Learn what triggers your child's asthma episodes and how to identify asthma triggers in your home. Talk about ways to get rid of those triggers. Find out what daily medicines your child should take to control or prevent asthma.

## Step 2: Make a Plan

Work with your doctor to create an Asthma Action Plan that will help you learn to prevent your child's asthma episodes. A plan will help you control your child's asthma on a regular basis. Make sure to include instructions for asthma medicines, what to do if your child has an episode, when to call your doctor, and a list of emergency telephone numbers. Give a copy of the plan to your child's school (teacher, coach, nurse) and babysitter.

## Step 3: Asthma-Proof Your Home

Triggers are a part of everyday life. Asthma episodes can be triggered by things like mold growing on shower curtains or tiny dust mites that live in blankets, pillows, or a child's stuffed animals.

## Second-hand Smoke is a Trigger!

Choose not to smoke in your home and car and do not allow family and visitors to do so. Infants and toddlers are especially vulnerable to the health risks from second-hand smoke. Do not allow childcare providers or others who work in your home to smoke. Until you can quit, choose to smoke outside. Moving to another room or opening a window is not enough to protect your children.

# Asthma Resources

If you would like to speak with an asthma expert, contact one of the toll free hotlines listed below:

**Allergy and Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics**  
1-800-878-4403

**American Lung Association** 1-800-586-4872 or  
[www.lungusa.org/local](http://www.lungusa.org/local)

**Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**  
1-800-727-8463 (7 a.m. until midnight)

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** provides free materials to help you learn more about controlling indoor asthma triggers: [www.epa.gov/asthma](http://www.epa.gov/asthma) or call 1-800-438-4318.

**U.S. Environmental Agency and the Ad Council:**  
1-866-NO-ATTACKS or [www.noattacks.org](http://www.noattacks.org). You can download a *funbook* with games for your child at this site that will teach all about asthma.

**Parent and Community Asthma Coalition: PARAT**  
(Pediatric Asthma Resource Action Team) 727-767-4188



In South Pinellas County the *Steps to a Healthier Florida* program offers free

**outpatient Asthma Care Coordination through All Children's Hospital. Call Omar Zidi at 727-767-4376.**

**For a free home inspection to assist in identifying triggers in your home (this is a voluntary program, offering suggestions and recommendations only) call Stan 727-507-4336 ext. 1336.**

(Available in most areas of South Pinellas Co.)



For information about Steps to a HealthierFL-Pinellas County visit our website: [www.StepsFL.com](http://www.StepsFL.com) or call 2-1-1 (Pinellas County cell phone users must call 727-210-4211)

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