Preparing for the Back to School Asthma Spike

The beginning of a new school year is the busiest time of year for schools due to the new arrival of students and staff. With 1 in 10 children living with asthma, Asthma Foundation Queensland is encouraging schools to ensure they are prepared for their students’ asthma this school year.

The Back To School Asthma Spike
In Australia, there is a well documented spike in hospital emergency department presentations amongst children and adolescents due to asthma at the beginning of each school year. The spike usually lasts for the first two to four weeks of the school term, peaking in mid to late February.

Why Does The Spike Occur?
Upon return to school, with large numbers of children coming together, the potential to share cold viruses between students increases, and as such, a spike in asthma symptoms associated with colds may result. This not only affects students with asthma, but also parents who may catch the virus from their child.

Additionally, over the school holidays children and adolescents are less likely to have a structured, day-to-day routine as they do during the school term. As a result, it is common for children and adolescents with asthma to be less vigilant in taking their preventer medication everyday, as prescribed. This can potentially lead to underlying inflammation and mucus production in the airways which could increase the risk of an asthma flare-up upon returning to school.

Poorly controlled asthma, or an asthma flare-up, can have a significant impact on a child’s ability to learn, participate and concentrate at school. In fact, asthma is a leading cause of absenteeism in school students.

When asthma is poorly controlled, students are more likely to be easily fatigued and lack concentration. This may cause them to fall behind in school work, and limit their participation in school sport and other curricular activities.

How Can My School Be Prepared?
— Provide parents with medical and medication authorisation forms for completion.
— Request an up-to-date Asthma Plan written and signed by the student’s doctor.
— Notify parents if their child required blue/grey reliever medication during school hours.
— Ensure majority of staff are trained in the National Asthma First Aid Procedure (more information overleaf).
— Maintain easy and quick access to blue/grey reliever medication and spacers at all times (including school excursions and camps).

How Can Parents Be Prepared?
— Provide a blue/grey reliever medication (e.g. Ventolin), with the original pharmacy label, and spacer to the school for their child.
— Supply an up-to-date Asthma Plan written and signed by their child’s doctor.
— Complete and return appropriate medical and medication authorisation forms (if required).
— Maintain regular communication with school staff, and notify school staff if there is a change in their child’s asthma management.
Asthma Information Sessions for Parents and Students

Asthma Foundation Queensland can provide FREE asthma information sessions to parents and students at your school.

Delivered by an Asthma Foundation Educator, these sessions are tailored exclusively to the needs of your school and can include topics such as: what is asthma, medications, spacers, asthma plans and asthma first aid.

Our Educator can help address any issues regarding asthma at your school, and educate parents on how they can best assist school staff in managing their child with asthma.

To arrange a parent or student session at your school, contact 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462) or email a.walton@asthmaqld.org.au.

Asthma First Aid Training

Is your school up-to-date?

Asthma First Aid training is available FREE of charge for schools from Asthma Foundation Queensland. The one-hour training can be completed face-to-face, online or via a web-conference.

Delivered by an Asthma Foundation Queensland representative, school staff learn about:

- What is Asthma?
- Signs and Symptoms
- Asthma Medications
- Asthma Plans
- Recognising and Assessing an Asthma Attack
- Asthma First Aid

All school staff who receive training are issued an Asthma First Aid certificate valid for three years. This certificate authorises trained school staff to:

- Purchase blue reliever medication (such as Ventolin) for storage in a school’s first aid kit or Asthma Emergency Kit, and
- Access blue reliever medication stored in a school’s first aid and administer to a student presenting with signs of worsening asthma

Email j.brown@asthmaqld.org.au to arrange a training session, or contact our training team on 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462).

Asthma Resources for Schools

Asthma Foundation Queensland has a range of asthma resources available for schools. These include:

- Asthma First Aid A4 posters
- Asthma First Aid Magnets
- Asthma Care Plans
- Asthma Emergency Kits

To order any of these resources, please email j.brown@asthmaqld.org.au, or contact 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462).
National Young People and Asthma Survey

On 20 January, Asthma Australia launched the findings of our National Young People and Asthma survey at the Sydney Trapeze School. The survey was conducted in May-July 2014 in conjunction with researchers at Young and Well CRC in Melbourne. 533 young people aged 12-25 years across Australia completed the survey.

Key findings include,

— Despite 80% believing their asthma to be well controlled, a standard test indicated that 63% have poorly controlled asthma
— 52% were likely to have a mild to severe mental health issue
— 91% experienced shortness of breath at least once a week
— 56% said asthma limits their enjoyment of life
— 42% have missed school, work or social events due to asthma
— 15% have interrupted sleep four or more times a week
— 86% are using their reliever medication to treat symptoms, while less than 60% are using their preventer medication daily (as prescribed) to help control their asthma.

Another aspect of the survey was to ask what young people want to help support them with their management of asthma,

— 59% want an asthma app
— 52% want a website specific to young people with asthma
— 40% want resources that help friends to understand about asthma
— 27% want an online forum

Initiatives resulting from the survey findings will be provided to Secondary Schools as they become available.

Asthma Kids

A new resource for primary aged students will be available in term 1. Asthma Kids takes children on a trail with the character Chester. They collect blue balloons as they answer questions and complete tasks. The 2 videos in the package are aimed at children under 9 and those 9 and over.

Asthma Kids is aimed at all children, with key messages for children with asthma and for others who may have family or friends with asthma or just want to know more about this common condition (1 in 10 children in Australia).

Check out the Asthma Australia website for the release of Asthma Kids in March.