

Newsletter for schools & other education settings

Welcome to 2015!

Be prepared for an Asthma Spike

What is the February asthma spike?

'Spikes' are significant increases in asthma presentations to hospitals and emergency departments.

For children and adolescents with asthma these 'spikes' occur soon after the return to school and other education settings following the long holiday break.

Therefore, a significant 'spike' in asthma presentations and admissions to hospital for children and adolescents, experiencing severe asthma exacerbations, occurs throughout the first few weeks of February.



Why does the spike occur?

While there have not been direct links established, the February 'asthma spike' is believed to be largely due to children and adolescents coming back into contact with asthma triggers in and around their school environment, that they have had time away from during the holidays. Forgetting to take their medication, (because their asthma feels better during the summer) and poor medication adherence, also places students at an increased risk of asthma attacks when exposed to triggers.

Triggers that can be encountered are:

- Respiratory viruses, such as cold and flu viruses.
- Anxiety and stress due to returning to school.
- Cleaning products that leave behind strong smells, aerosols or airborne dust.
- Dust and mould spores from poorly ventilated, or insufficiently cleaned school rooms.

What can we do to avoid asthma exacerbations in our school?

- Ensure your school has a sufficient amount of **Asthma Emergency Kits**. A minimum of 2 and at least one per every 300 Students.



- Ensure that each kit contains in-date reliever medication (e.g. *Ventolin*, *Asmol* or *Airomir*), 2 spacers, [reliever record sheet](#) and instructions detailing the emergency procedure.
- Ensure student [Asthma Care Plans](#) are updated on an annual basis and returned to school.
- Ensure **staff education** and training is up to date.
- Ensure your school's **Asthma Policy** is current.
- Ensure staff are aware of which students in their class have asthma, and know where Asthma Emergency Kits are stored.
- Ensure all classrooms are opened, cleaned and aired out in the weeks before students return to school.

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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.



Will in WA wants to rely less on his puffer © The West Australian

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.

