

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



Getting Ready for Fall

Now that summer is coming to an end, it's time to think about getting ready for school, fall allergies and cooler weather. This is also a time when people with asthma may notice a change in their condition. Being prepared for these changes can make a big difference in keeping your or your child's asthma well controlled.

Preparing for the New School Year

It is important for your child and the school staff to be prepared for managing asthma at school. The school staff should have information on how to help prevent symptoms and what to do if your child has symptoms.

Ask your doctor for a written Asthma Action Plan for the school. This plan should include what medicine to use to treat asthma symptoms and changes in peak flow zones and what medicine to use as a pretreatment before exercise. Also include information on what makes your child's asthma worse, his or her asthma symptoms and emergency telephone numbers.

Plan a meeting with school staff before or in the beginning weeks of the school year. Your child also can be involved in the meeting. Take the written Asthma Action Plan to the meeting. Helpful school staff to have at the meeting are the school nurse, health aide, teacher and physical education teacher. Topics to discuss at the meeting include:

- What makes asthma worse, especially in the school setting
- Asthma symptoms, including your child's awareness of symptoms
- Peak flow use (if used by your child), including technique and the use of peak flow zones
- Use of quick-relief medicine at school and field trips, including correct technique. If your child uses a metered-dose inhaler, a spacer is recommended.

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- Who to call if the quick-relief medicine is not improving asthma symptoms or peak flow zones. The written Asthma Action Plan will outline these steps.
- Whether your child is responsible enough to keep the quick-relief medicine with him or her. If not, the quick-relief medicine should be quickly accessible when asthma symptoms occur at school.
- Use of a pretreatment for gym class or other physical activities, especially outdoors in cold weather.
- Continue talking with your child and school staff about managing asthma at school on a regular basis, even if everything is fine at school.
- Talk with your child's doctor about when to keep him/her home from school due to worsening of asthma or illness. Mild asthma symptoms can often be handled at school. When deciding whether to keep your child at home, consider the following: what is causing asthma symptoms, how stable are peak flows, is a fever present, how much medicine your child is taking, etc.
- Talk with the school staff if your child misses school and homework.

Tips for Fall Allergies

Weeds and molds often cause fall allergies. Some seasons produce more pollen from weeds or mold spores because of weather conditions. One of the primary weeds responsible for allergy symptoms is ragweed. A lot of rain in the spring and early summer followed by sunny, hot days tend to produce more ragweed. Rainy days and piles of wet leaves lead to more mold growth. If weed pollens or molds cause your allergy symptoms, there are some steps you can take:

- Plan outdoor activities for early in the day, as weed pollens are highest around midday. If you are outdoors during high pollen counts, take a shower, wash your hair and change your clothes when you come indoors.
- If possible, keep windows and outside doors shut during pollen season. This is very important when pollen and mold counts are high. These counts are often reported on the TV news and in the newspaper.
- Stay away from wet leaves and garden trash.
- Take medicine your doctor recommends. Many different medicines are available to help control allergy symptoms when you can't avoid the things to which you are allergic. Keep in mind that allergy medicines work best when you take them every day and it is best to start taking them before you are exposed to high levels of pollen or mold. Most allergists recommend that you start an antihistamine when the allergy season begins and continue taking it every day until allergy season is over. When allergy season is in full swing and your immune system is in high gear, medicines are less effective and take longer to relieve symptoms. Some over the counter antihistamines cause drowsiness. If they cause drowsiness, they may also affect thinking and muscle function. If you take one of these, use caution when operating a motor vehicle or machinery at work.

Tips for Fall Weather

- Fall is a season when a lot of weather changes can occur. Be prepared for changes in temperature and rainy days by having a sweater, jacket or rain gear with you. With cooler weather approaching, this is also a good time to have your furnace

checked and the filters replaced

Tips for Avoiding Infections

- **Wash your hands often.** Hands are the biggest reservoir and carrier of these unwanted germs. One of the most common ways people catch colds and the flu is by touching a contaminated surface, then rubbing their noses or their eyes. Wash your hands often, especially:
 - before, during, and after you prepare food
 - before you eat, and after you use the bathroom
 - after handling animals or animal waste
 - when your hands are dirty, and
 - more frequently when someone in your home is sick,
- **Avoid unnecessary contact with a lot of people.** It isn't always easy to tell when people are sick, and some people are contagious even before they have symptoms, so avoid large crowds of people if you can.
- **Avoid close contact with people when you are sick.** It isn't really possible to completely avoid people who are sick. But you can help fight the problem if you avoid exposing other people to you or your child's germs when you or your kids are sick. So don't let them go to school or daycare, if they are sick.
- **Teach your children 'cough etiquette'.** Teach children to turn their heads and cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or the inside of their elbow if they don't have a tissue, instead of simply coughing or sneezing onto their hands, which will then spread their germs onto everything they touch.
- **Clean, clean, clean.** Routinely clean, with soap and water, and disinfect surfaces, toys, and objects that younger children may put in their mouths. It may also help to wipe surfaces with paper towels that can be thrown away or cloth towels that can be washed afterwards.
- **Water fountains can be the enemy.** Take a reusable water bottle to school, instead of using the school water fountain, which may become contaminated with germs, especially during cold and flu season.
- Lastly, it's almost time for the yearly flu shot, so start watching for locations and times when flu shots will be given.

Fall is a very busy time of year for most people – keeping your asthma and allergies under control can help you enjoy this beautiful season!

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE® (1-800-222-LUNG). It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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