Your Child with Asthma at School

Many students today are affected by asthma. In fact, the Center for Disease Control estimates that three students in a classroom of thirty are likely to have asthma. There is much that can be done to help your child be safe, healthy and manage asthma at school. Parents should also be aware that there is a state law that governs asthma and medication use at school. Keeping children with asthma safe and healthy at school has the best chance of success when everyone in the school community does their part. This includes administrators, teachers, parents and the children themselves.

Relevance:

- Students with asthma are at high risk of missing school.
- School districts are required to have policies regarding asthma medication use.

Actions to Take:

- Speak to the principal and school nurse at the start of each school year about your child’s asthma triggers, symptoms of worsening asthma, the medications your child takes and your child’s ability to correctly use his/her inhaler.
- Have an up-to-date, written Asthma Action Plan on file for your child at the school.
- Complete and return medical forms the school may give you.
- Communicate with teachers, including the physical education teacher, if your child has exercise induced asthma.
- Send your child’s inhaler to school with him/her every day.
- Help your child understand and learn his/her unique asthma triggers and symptoms.
- Teach your child when and how to properly use his/her inhaler or to speak up when s/he notices early signs of an asthma attack.
- If your child is age 14 or older, begin to consider and plan for how asthma will be managed when s/he transitions to life after high school.

Good Practices:

- Schools should establish comprehensive school district-wide policies for asthma management and support.
- Schools can create an asthma friendly environment to reduce environmental triggers.
- Asthma awareness and education programs should be provided for all students and faculty.
Basic Facts:

Children with asthma are prevalent in all school settings. Asthma is one of the major health reasons that Pennsylvania children miss school days and are hospitalized. In order for children to be safe and healthy at school, parents, educators, school nurses and administrators must all work together.

In 2004, Act 187 was enacted requiring that all Pennsylvania school districts permit students to carry their asthma inhalers with them during the school day and to self-administer the medication. Each school district must have a written policy to govern the use of inhalers in the school. Schools are permitted to require physician and parent consent for students to carry and use their asthma inhalers at school. Students who desire to carry their inhalers must have the skills and responsible behavior needed to independently and correctly use the medication.

The suggested way to help coordinate asthma care at school is through an Asthma Action Plan. An Asthma Action Plan is a written document that tells the school nurse the type of treatment a student receives for asthma, the type of symptoms the child exhibits, the severity of the child’s condition and how to treat the student in case of an asthma attack. Having an action plan at school for your child is extremely important for his/her health and safety while in the care of the school. Even if your child’s asthma is well managed, the school should have a plan in place in case of an asthma attack. You can request an Asthma Action Plan form from your school nurse or from an asthma resource organization. As follow-up to creating an Asthma Action Plan, parents should also communicate with the child’s teachers so all educators are aware of what to do if your child is having difficulty. Remember to include your child’s physical education teacher, especially if your child has exercise induced asthma.

The school should have daily access to your child’s fast acting medication, such as an inhaler, or school policies should be followed that enable your child to carry his/her asthma inhaler daily. If medication is not at school when your child has an asthma attack, the school may send your child to an emergency room for treatment. This care option is the least favored option because it puts your child at risk and disrupts your child’s education and possibly your work day as you are called to the hospital. Communication and planning between home and school is the key to successfully managing asthma at school.

Finally, begin early to teach your child about his/her asthma. Even young children can learn the name of their health difficulty, recognize symptoms and request help. Over time your child will gain the confidence and skills to manage asthma and to advocate for his or her own health needs independently. This is especially important to youth ages 14 and over who are transitioning from school to adult life.

Resources:

PA Dept of Health: Use of Asthma Inhalers at School: www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?A=174&Q=244912

American Respiratory Alliance: www.healthylungs.org/programsservices/child/

American Lung Association of Pennsylvania: www.lunginfo.org/