

ASTHMA FRIENDLY CLASSROOM

Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease. Children with asthma have sensitive airways. Children are sensitive to many things that start or trigger symptoms and make the asthma worse. The most common asthma triggers are allergies to dust mites, cockroaches, animal dander, molds and pollens, and exposure to irritating smoke, smells, poor outdoor air quality or very cold air. Children's asthma can also be triggered by upper respiratory diseases and excessive exercise. When children are exposed to triggers everyday their airways remain chronically irritated or inflamed making it hard for them to breathe. Asthma is serious and can be deadly. Even mild symptoms can be serious or even fatal. Research shows that one third of people that die from asthma have mild symptoms, one third moderate and one third severe.

The goals of asthma care are for children's symptoms to be under control allowing children to sleep, learn and play like other children. Asthma can be controlled by being aware of its warning signs and symptoms, avoiding things that trigger asthma problems and using medications to treat and prevent asthma episodes.

Remember each child is different so it is important to understand the triggers for each child and work with the parents and physicians to insure that an appropriate Asthma Action Plan (treatment plan) is prepared and followed.

There are many things that head start programs can do to insure a safe and healthy environment for children with asthma and allergies while the child is at school. The following are some of the keys to a healthy environment for Children:

Avoiding and Controlling Allergens.

Dust Mites

- Surfaces are wiped with a damp cloth daily. (No aerosol "dusting" sprays are used)
- Floors are cleaned with a damp mop daily. (Be sure the mops are kept clean and free from mold)
- Small area rugs are used rather than wall-to-wall carpeting. Woven rugs that can be washed in hot water are the best. (Water temperatures above 130° will kill dust mites.)
- Children's bed linens, personal blankets and toys are washed weekly in hot water.
- Fabric items such as stuffed toys and dress-up clothing are washed weekly in hot water.
- Furniture surfaces are wiped with a damp cloth.
- Soft mattresses and upholstered furniture are avoided.
- Beds and pillows that children sleep or rest on are encased in special allergy-proof covers.
- Use blinds that are easily cleanable instead of curtains. Wipe weekly with a damp cloth.
- If curtains are used wash regularly in hot water. (Be sure to check with the fire Marshall as washing curtains may affect the fire proof treatment.)
- Books, magazines and toys are stored in enclosed bookcases, closed boxes or heavy plastic bags.

- Keep the room free of clutter and piles of paper. Store supplies and materials in closed cabinets.

Animals – Both pets and pests shed dander, droppings and other proteins which may cause allergic response or triggers asthma.

- Do not keep furry or feathered pets on the premise. (Cats, dogs, gerbils, hamsters, birds, etc.)
- Use the least toxic materials to aggressively control mice and cockroaches. If using any type of toxic sprays do not use while children are present and notify the parents in advance.
- Do not use feather stuffed furnishings, pillows or toys.

Molds and Mildew

- Exhaust fans must be used in bathrooms, kitchens and basement areas to help remove humidity.
- Wet carpeting and padding are removed if not dry within 24 hours to prevent mold growth. (Professional carpet restoration companies should be used to dry and clean carpet that has been flooded with water from broken pipes, flooded bathrooms or leaky ceilings.)
- Mats placed on carpeted floors are vinyl covered and are wiped regularly with diluted chlorine bleach and water (1/4 cup bleach to 1 gallon water)
- Prevent mildew from baths and other damp areas by wiping regularly with diluted chlorine bleach and water. Repair any plumbing leaks immediately.
- Indoor houseplants and foam pillow can develop mold growth and should not be used in areas of high humidity and where mold growth is a serious issue. In Arizona be sure to not over water plants and watch soil and saucers for any signs of mold growth. Use plastic liners under the plants to prevent water from dripping on floors or surrounding areas. Clean plastic liners frequently to prevent mold growth.

Outdoor pollens and mold spores

- If ventilation is adequate keep windows closed during periods of high pollen count or poor air quality.
- Air conditioners with clean filters should be used in warm seasons.
- Outdoor yard and play areas are kept clear fallen leaves, compost piles and cut grass.
- Mow grass when children are not present.

Latex

- Avoid latex gloves. Use only non-powdered, non-latex gloves.
- Avoid latex, pacifiers, koosh balls and other latex products (if a child or staff member has latex sensitivity).
- Avoiding or Controlling Irritants

Tobacco Smoke – U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona released a report entitled, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*. "The debate is over. The science is clear. Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance but a serious health hazard," Carmona said. "Smoking is the nation's single greatest cause of disease and death."

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk of acute respiratory infections, ear problems, and more severe asthma. Smoking by parents and prolonged exposure to second hand smoke causes respiratory symptoms and slows lung growth in children. The impact on the health and development of children is more severe than previously thought. "Children are especially vulnerable to the poisons in second hand smoke."

- Smoking is not allowed anywhere on the premise.
- Staff and parents are encouraged to participate in smoking cessation programs. Referrals are given to parent and staff to non-smoking programs.

Chemical Fumes, Fragrances and other Strong Odors

- Arts and craft materials with fragrances or fumes are avoided (e.g. markers, paints, adhesives) If they are used, extra ventilation is provided.
- Staff should not wear perfume or other scented personal products. (Use "fragrance-free" products).
- Personal care products such as hair spray, nail polish and powders are not used around the children.
- Air fragrance sprays, incense, and "air fresheners" should not be used.
- Check new purchases such as pressed-wood furnishing and plastic laminated products for formaldehyde fumes and air them outside before installation.
- Cleaning supplies and home repair products with strong smells are not used when children are present and indoor spaces are ventilated during and after their use.
- Office equipment that emits fumes such as photocopiers are used in well ventilated areas away from children.

Policies and Practices

Asthma Management and Care

- All staff members are trained to watch for symptoms of asthma, warning signs that asthma is flaring up and how to recognize emergency situations. New staff receives this training when hired.
- Asthma Screenings are done on every child and follow-up is provided to insure that children have the necessary medical evaluation and treatment to insure that the child can fully participate in the classroom activities.
- Every child with asthma has a written Asthma Action Plan on file, listing allergies and asthma triggers, medication schedules and emergency instructions.
- Staff is trained to administer medication and in the use and care of nebulizers, inhalers, spacers and peak flow meters or a nurse is available to the classroom at all times.
- Parents and providers communicate regularly about the child's asthma status.

- Outdoor time is adjusted for cold-sensitive or pollen-sensitive children and alternative indoor activities are offered. (After an asthma episode or viral infection children are more sensitive)
- Monitor daily air quality and keep children in on Orange or Red Air Quality days. On yellow days monitor sensitive children for any signs of asthma symptoms and limit outdoor activities as needed. Often children with asthma show increased symptoms a day after air quality alert days. Watch children carefully the day following an air quality alert for symptoms of asthma symptoms. Be especially careful during weeks when several alerts occur on subsequent days. The cumulative effect of especially ozone exposure is thought to increase the severity of symptoms.
- Staff and children must wash hands frequently. Children are taught good hand washing techniques.
- Toys and surfaces are wiped often to prevent the spread of viral infections that can trigger asthma.

General Physical Site/Space

- The ventilation system provides good air flow in all rooms and halls in every season. Outdoor intake and supply vents are checked regularly for blockages.
- The source of any musty or stale smell is located and repaired appropriately.
- Heating and cooling system filters are properly installed and changed often. Heating and cooling system are serviced at least on an annual basis.
- Outdoor fumes from car exhaust, idling vans or buses or nearby businesses are prevented from entering the building through open windows or doors.
- The building is checked regularly for leaks and areas of standing water.
- Plumbing leaks are fixed promptly.
- Doormats are placed outside of all entrances to reduce tracking of allergens.

Cleaning and Maintenance

- If rugs or carpets must be used vacuum every day or two with a high efficiency vacuum cleaner preferably with a HEPA filter.
- Dust often with a damp cloth to avoid stirring up the dust.
- Vacuuming and cleaning should be done when children are not present.
- Shampooing of rugs and upholstery is done with low emission, fragrance-free products and are thoroughly dried to prevent growth of mold and dust mites. Consider steam cleaning which usually uses less water and chemicals.
- Painting, repairs or construction work is done when children are not present. Use low VOC paints and low odor carpet/tile glues. Protect indoor spaces from construction dust, debris, strong odors and fumes.
- Keep garbage in tightly covered containers and removed promptly to outdoor enclosed trash area that is not accessible to children.
- Use integrated pest management techniques to control insect including sealing all cracks in the walls, floors and ceilings, eliminate clutter and keeping food in airtight containers.
- Use pesticides only when necessary and applied properly when children are not present using the least toxic products available.
- Notification must be given to parents prior to application of any pesticides.