

Glossary



airways - Common term used to describe the passages in the lungs that move air into and out of the body. Sometimes called bronchial tubes, bronchi or respiratory system.

allergen - A substance which causes an allergic response in sensitive individuals. Allergens can be either natural (e.g., pollen, dust) or man made (e.g., perfume, cleaning agents).

allergy/allergies - An overreaction by the body's immune system to a specific substance called an allergen. An allergy occurs only in people sensitive to a particular allergen(s).

allergic reaction - Response in children sensitive to specific allergens. An allergic reaction can occur in different parts of the body. Common areas include the skin, the eyes, the respiratory system and the gastrointestinal tract. Symptoms often include itching, sneezing, runny nose, coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath.

anaphylactic shock/anaphylaxis - The most severe or extreme type of allergic reaction, creating a potentially life-threatening medical emergency. Most common cause is reaction to a medication. Other causes include insect stings and foods.

asthma - A lung disease which is usually ongoing or continuous (chronic). Symptoms may include wheezing, coughing, feeling of "tightness" in the chest, difficulty breathing, itching neck, throat and ears. Symptoms vary greatly from person to person, and usually, individuals with asthma also experience "ups and downs" with symptoms. No cause or cure is yet known. Symptoms can be well managed and stabilized for most people who have asthma. Certain substances or conditions may trigger asthma symptoms.

asthma action plan - A document which outlines the treatment approach for a child who has asthma; developed in consultation with the health care provider, family members and caregivers. Effective action plans help children control their asthma and live healthy active lives.

asthma episode/attack/exacerbation - A time when asthma symptoms flare up or intensify, requiring immediate adjustments in treatment and medication to get symptoms under control. Asthma episodes may occur suddenly, with few warning signs, or build slowly over a period of hours or even days. Most asthma episodes can be handled by following the child's asthma action plan. Often called "asthma attacks," the more appropriate term is "asthma episode."

asthma management - can be defined as "managing, preventing, treating and controlling factors (environmental, medications etc.) that affects a child's asthma.


asthma management plan - Detailed guidelines for schools to use in working with all children and staff to manage asthma.

brittle asthma - This is a rare form of asthma where a child gets little or no warning of an asthma episode. They can go from being perfectly well to having a severe life-threatening attack in the space of a few minutes.

bronchial tubes - The major airways of the respiratory system that carry air from the trachea (windpipe) to the microscopic air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs.

bronchitis - An infection or inflammation in the bronchial tubes caused by bacteria, a virus, an allergy or other irritants. Typical symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chills, fever, fatigue and excessive phlegm.

bronchodilator - A medication used by many children who have asthma to relax bronchial muscles, and in turn, open up the bronchial tubes.



bronchospasm; bronchoconstriction - The tightening in the airways of the respiratory system that occurs with asthma or allergies. Caused when the muscles around the bronchial tubes contract in response to specific triggers.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - CDC serves as the national focus for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities designed to improve the health of the people of the United States.

Controller or long-term acting medication - The standard treatment of asthma for most children who need regular, or ongoing, medicine. These kinds of medications provide “long-term relief,” by acting in a preventive way to make airways less sensitive, minimizing or reducing symptoms before they even appear.

Corticosteroid – Steroidal anti-inflammatory medication useful for children who have asthma. Considered the most effective “controller” medication available today. Delivered as an inhaler, in pill or liquid form. Not the same as anabolic steroids.

dander – Scaly or shredded dry skin that comes from animals or bird feathers. Dander may be a cause of an allergic response in susceptible persons.

diurna - Variation In the context of asthma, this is the difference between how wide the airways in the lungs are if measured twelve hours apart. Our airways narrow and open naturally over each 24 hour period even in people who do not have asthma. In children who have asthma, the variation is much greater. Generally, the greater the diurnal variation, the more unstable the child’s asthma. Diurnal variation is usually measured in asthma by taking morning and evening peak flow readings. There are a number of ways of calculating diurnal variation.

eczema - This is an allergy of the skin, which shows patches of red, itchy inflammation which may weep or blister.

environmental control measures - Specific procedures undertaken to remove known allergens or irritants from a designated area.

EPI-PEN - The trade name, or manufacturer’s name, for a device used to deliver epinephrine, a medication used to bring quick relief by improving breathing and heart function in life-threatening medical emergencies.


exercise-induced asthma – (EIA)- Asthma symptoms which appear following strenuous exercise. Symptoms may be minimal or severe enough to require emergency treatment. About one in 10 students experience exercise-induced asthma.

hidden ingredients - Some prepared food products contain derivatives or “by products” of other foods. These “hidden ingredients” may or may not be shown on the food label.

inhaler/metered-dose inhaler (MDI) – A device used to deliver a variety of commonly prescribed asthma medications which help ease breathing by opening up the airways.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) - Procedures developed by the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce exposure to cockroaches, rats, mice, and other pests that may invade a school setting.

intrinsic asthma - Children whose symptoms do not seem to be brought on by anything external are said to have non-allergic or intrinsic asthma. It is more common in children who develop asthma for the first time in adulthood. Symptoms are more likely to be triggered by, for example, exercise, emotion or some drugs such as aspirin.



irritant - Any substance which causes inflammation or an adverse reaction on the skin or in the body. An irritant may trigger asthma or allergy symptoms, but they may not be considered an allergen. Examples of irritants include tobacco smoke, chemical fumes, insecticides or air pollution.

long-term acting medication or controller medication - The standard treatment of asthma for most children who need regular, or ongoing, medicine. These kinds of medications provide “long-term relief,” by acting in a preventive way to make airways less sensitive, minimizing or reducing symptoms before they even appear.

mucus - Often called phlegm or sputum, this slippery fluid is produced by the membranes lining the airways to aid in various body functions. Exposure to certain triggers can increase mucus production for asthma patients. The increased amount of mucus makes breathing more difficult.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) – Founded in 1887, the National Institutes of Health today is one of the world’s foremost medical research centers, and the federal focal point for medical research in the United States. The NIH, comprising 27 separate Institutes and Centers, is one of eight health agencies of the Public Health Service, which, in turn, is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NHLBI (National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute) is part of the NIH.

nebulizer - A small, portable machine used to deliver certain asthma medications. The nebulizer is plugged into an electrical outlet. A nebulizer treatment usually takes 10-15 minutes to complete. Children requiring regular nebulizer treatments may need access to a nebulizer at school.

peak flow meter (PFM) - A small, portable hand-held device which measures how well the lungs are able to expel air, allowing children who have asthma to detect airway narrowing and adjust medications accordingly.

quick relief medication or rescue medication - Medicine taken to relieve asthma symptoms. Called “quick relief” because they can act immediately to reduce symptoms that appear suddenly.

respiratory virus - Illnesses affecting the airways caused by a virus. Symptoms of respiratory virus are similar to asthma symptoms. Children who have asthma may experience increased asthma symptoms for some time following a respiratory virus.

sensitivity/sensitization - Refers to a person’s response when exposed to an allergen. For some people, repeated exposure to certain substances makes them more likely to develop an allergic reaction.

spacer - A short tube device which can be attached to an inhaler to help the child use the inhaler more effectively.

trigger/triggers - A substance or environmental condition that cause asthma or allergy symptoms to appear.

wheezing/wheeze - The whistling sound which occurs when air moves through narrowed or tightened airways. May be heard on exhalation. Wheezing is a classic symptom of asthma. Not all wheezing can be heard by the ears; a stethoscope may be needed to detect levels of wheezing within the lungs.