



Introduction

Asthma has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. More than 20 million Americans currently have asthma, including an estimated 6.3 million children under the age of 18.¹ This chronic, but manageable, disease affects 1 in 13 school-aged children.¹

In K-12 schools, asthma is having a sizeable impact on the lives of students and staff.

Consider these facts:




- Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness.²
Over 14 million school days are missed due to asthma each year.³
- Asthma can affect a student's academic performance. It can disrupt sleep and the ability to concentrate. It can also cause a child to miss out on important social interactions and school activities.
- Asthma can be life threatening. An asthma episode can quickly escalate and may result in death if a student does not receive prompt medical attention.

The good news is that asthma can be managed. It can usually be controlled with the right medications and modifications to the environment. But it must be managed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Because children spend a great deal of time in school, school staff members can play a pivotal role in helping students manage their asthma. By working together as well as with parents/guardians, medical providers and the students themselves, we can devise strategies that ensure their health and safety and allow them to get the most from their time in school.

Effective asthma management can result in:

- **A supportive learning environment for students with asthma.**
- **Reduced absences.** Students have fewer episodes and symptoms are treated earlier.
- **Reduced disruption in the classroom.** Students have fewer symptoms when they adhere to their asthma action plan.
- **Appropriate emergency care.** School staff members are prepared to respond to emergencies.
- **Full student participation in physical activities.** Physical education (PE) instructors and coaches know how to prevent exercise induced asthma (EIA).
- **Increased time for staff members.** Students spend less time in the nurse's office and away from class when asthma is well managed.

This manual is designed to educate school personnel about asthma and to share practices that help ensure a safe learning environment for students with asthma. The manual contains separate sections for each staff discipline. Each section contains information about why this is important, what that person should know, and what that person can do. Certain forms, policies and educational materials are available in the folders of the Resource Section. When you see   , go to the Resource Section for supplemental materials pertinent to that particular statement. These materials can be removed and copied for use when providing asthma information to all school personnel or other interested individuals. The entire manual is provided on the enclosed CD and available on the MDH asthma website at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/>, click on "School Health". Most of the forms/documents are offered in a word or PDF document so you may add your own logo or other pertinent information.

The CD and website contain forms and educational materials translated into languages in addition to english.

Citations

¹ "Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality, 2000–2001," National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

² "Asthma in Children Fact Sheet," American Lung Association, June 17, 2003.
www.lungusa.org/asthma/ascpedfac99.html

³ "Surveillance for Asthma – United States, 1980–1999," MMWR Surveillance Summaries, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 29, 2002.

Every school staff member will have contact with students who have asthma. That's why it's important that each understands his/her role as part of an effective asthma management program. Students with asthma should be able to live healthy, active lives without symptoms. The information in this manual can take us closer to achieving that goal.