

News Release

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For Immediate Release

Back to School with Asthma

How to avoid the "September spike" in asthma symptoms

(Ottawa) With a new school year starting, it is time to make a “back to school” to-do list. And if you are a parent of a child with asthma, you also have to plan for the “September spike” – the annual peak in asthma flare-ups that sends hundreds of school children and their family members to emergency rooms in the weeks after school begins.

To help you prepare for the new school year we have created the back to school with asthma checklist.

Doctors think the cold virus is the main cause for asthma flare-ups in September. When children go back to school, they’re in close quarters with many other kids – and the viruses they carry. Viruses, including the common cold, are the number one cause of asthma flare-ups in kids. For kids with asthma, especially uncontrolled asthma, a simple cold can lead to dangerous symptoms and unscheduled visits to the doctor or emergency room.

School children bring cold germs home from school and spread them to their parents and younger siblings. Doctors think this spread of cold germs explains why there’s a small rise in preschoolers’ and adults’ asthma flare-up in late September, soon after the spike in school kids’ flare-ups.

Other possible causes for September flare-ups:

- not taking preventer medicine as prescribed, especially in the summer months
- the stress of returning to school
- allergic triggers at school, like cat dander on kids’ clothes, mould and dust
- more pollution as school buses and commuters return in full force

Recent research shows that the use of asthma preventer medicine (inhaled corticosteroids) drops in the summer by 60 per cent¹. When they don’t get regular asthma preventer medicine, children may have swollen airways. If the children catch a virus, their swollen airways are less able to fight it off.

If your child has asthma but has not been taking his or her medication during the summer, now is the time to start. It's important to have your child's asthma symptoms are under good control. That way, if your child does catch a cold or the flu, your child's lungs will be better at fighting it off.

Your back-to-school asthma checklist (Before school starts)

- **Make sure your child understands how to manage their asthma.** Sit down and talk to your child about their asthma and answer any questions they may have about managing their asthma at school.
- **Fight germs by washing hands properly:** Teach your child and everyone in your family, how to fight germs by washing hands properly. Keep viruses in check with proper hand washing – use plenty of liquid soap and running water, or hand sanitizer. Rub hands for at least 20 seconds.
- **Triggers:** Know your child's asthma triggers and how to avoid them. Educate your child on all of their triggers.
- **Medication:** Check the expiry date on medicines and replace if necessary. Make sure that your child is taking his or her asthma preventer medicine as prescribed. Ensure that all of your child's medication is correctly labeled and make sure your child knows when to take the correct medication.
- **Action Plan:** Have a written asthma action plan and know how to use it. You can download an asthma action plan and ask a doctor or certified asthma educator to explain how to use it.
- **Visit a health care provider:** See your doctor or health-care provider if your child's action plan or medicine needs adjusting. Work with a certified asthma educator to learn how to better manage asthma. Search this online directory to find an asthma clinic or asthma education program in your area.
- **Vaccinate yourself and your child against seasonal flu (influenza):** Make sure your child and family members get the regular seasonal flu shot as soon as it is available.

Your back-to-school asthma checklist (To take to the school)

- Talk to teachers and daycare staff about your child's asthma, preferably before classes start about. Be sure to discuss: **Asthma Action Plan:** Give teachers and caregivers a copy of your child's asthma action plan and explain how to use it.

- **Triggers:** Explain your child's triggers and usual symptoms.
- **Medication:** Ask about the school's rules about asthma medications - stress the importance of allowing your child to carry his/her medicines with themselves at all times. Make sure your child's rescue medicine (blue puffer) is always nearby. Teach them where to find the medication and where to store an extra medication.
- **Hand Washing:** Ask that they remind children to wash their hands properly.
- **What to do in an emergency.** Make sure they have all emergency contact numbers.

Learn more

[Asthma and children](#)

[Asthma at school](#)

[Download our asthma handbook](#)

Find asthma programs near you: [use our search tool to find asthma support groups, asthma clinics, and asthma education centres in your area.](#)

About The Canadian Lung Association

Established in 1900, The Canadian Lung Association is one of Canada's oldest and most respected health charities, and the leading national organization for science-based information, research, education, support programs, and advocacy on lung health issues.

Year of the Lung

2010 has been declared the Year of the Lung, by the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS). The goal of this global campaign is to raise awareness about lung health among the public, initiate action in communities worldwide, and advocate for resources to combat lung disease including increased investment in basic, clinical and translational research worldwide.

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References

1. Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, Volume 102, Number 3, March 2009 - [Seasonal patterns in health care use and pharmaceutical claims for asthma prescriptions for preschool - and school-aged children pp. 198-204\(7\)](#)