



# Youth and Asthma

Patricia Tatman, M.S.  
Department of  
Family and Consumer  
Sciences, University of  
Wyoming

## What is Asthma?

Asthma is a condition that causes the airways to become blocked or narrowed when exposed to a trigger. When the airways come into contact with a trigger they become inflamed, and the related muscles tighten up, causing narrowing of the airways. A thick fluid then enters the airways causing even more narrowing. This is called an asthma attack. If the trigger causes a severe asthma attack, it can be potentially life threatening.

## What Causes Asthma?

Asthma can be a hereditary condition. It also occurs more frequently in people who are prone to allergies. Asthma attacks can be caused by exposure to cold air, exercise, viral infections, and allergens.

## What are Some Triggers of Asthma Attacks?

Some triggers of asthma attacks include:

- Exposure to cold air,
- Exercise,
- Allergens such as dust mites, mold, pollen, pet dander, latex, and cockroach debris,
- Tobacco smoke.

## What are Some Symptoms of Asthma?

Some symptoms of an asthma attack include:

- Coughing,
- Wheezing,
- Shortness of breath,
- Tightness in chest.

## What is the Treatment for Asthma?

Treatment includes inhalers and/or oral medications. These can be either quick-relief treatments or long-term use medications. Allergy shots may help reduce the number and severity of asthma attacks. Physical therapy can also be used to strengthen the lungs, which in



some cases helps alleviate asthma attacks. Some people seem to outgrow severe asthma attacks.

## **Important Issues for Extension Educators and 4-H Leaders to Consider:**

1. Have contact information for parents or guardians and the member's doctor in accessible places. An example of this would be behind the child's nametag and in the medical forms box in the main office at 4-H events. This form should include information such as what kinds of medications the child is taking, allergies, if any adaptive devices are used, and other health conditions.
2. Visit with the member and his or her parents about the member's asthma. Questions that can be asked include: "What medications do you take for your asthma?" and "What are some of the worst triggers for your asthma?"
3. There are often situations in 4-H which may trigger asthma attacks. Some of these situations include working with animals, being in a dusty arena, and participating in activities that require exercise. County and state fairs probably have every asthma trigger present. It is important to monitor the activities of a member with asthma and make sure he or she has the medication or that the medication is in an accessible spot at all times.
4. If a member begins to have an asthma attack, leaders should stay calm and do their best to keep the member calm. The severity of an asthma attack can be worsened if the member becomes agitated.

## **For More Information Contact:**

**Allergy & Asthma Network, Mothers of Asthmatics**  
2751 Prosperity Ave., Suite 150  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
Phone: (800) 878-4403  
Web site: [www.aanma.org](http://www.aanma.org)  
(Web site active as of May 2, 2005)



## **Acknowledgements:**

Appreciation is extended to the following reviewers: Matthew Cavedon, trustee, National 4-H Council; Terri Dawson, director, Parent Information Center, Buffalo, Wyoming; Roger Tormoehlen, head, Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education, Purdue University; and Karen C. Williams, associate professor and head, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Wyoming.

Special thanks is also given to David K. Carson, former professor of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Wyoming and Kent Becker, associate professor of Counselor Education at the University of Wyoming for comments on earlier versions of the articles in this series.

*Inclusive 4-H* coordinator, Randolph R. Weigel, professor and human development specialist, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service.