

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease involving inflammation of the airways that makes breathing difficult. Common symptoms include shortness of breath, tightness of the chest, wheezing and coughing. During an asthma episode, the person gasps for breath as the airways from the lungs become constricted and the passages inflamed and clogged with thick, sticky mucus. 80% of life-threatening asthma episodes occur at night.

While asthma cannot be cured, it can be controlled. This brochure will give you life saving information about warning signs, what triggers episodes, how to control asthma, and where to get help in Contra Costa County.

Who has Asthma?

ANYONE CAN HAVE IT. The number of reported asthma cases is rising, and in the United States, African Americans, children and women have shown the most dramatic increases. **CHILDREN ARE AT RISK.** An estimated 14.6 million Americans suffer from asthma, and 4.8 million are under the age of 18. It is the leading chronic disease of childhood, and the leading cause of school absenteeism attributed to chronic conditions.

AFRICAN AMERICANS

ARE AT RISK. In the age groups birth to four and 15 to 24, African Americans are six times more likely to die of asthma than Whites.

ASIAN, LATINO

AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS show slightly

higher incidences than Whites.



Asthma Medical Care and Resources for Families in Contra Costa

MEDICAL CARE

In case of a medical emergency call **911**

If you already have a doctor, contact him or her if you are worried that your child may have asthma.

If you think your child may have asthma and you want to see a medical provider but don't have health insurance, call **CONTRA COSTA HEALTH SERVICES** for an appointment at 1-800-495-8885.

If you are a member of Kaiser Health Plan call, **KAISER PERMANENTE HOSPITAL:** 1-800-33-ASK-ME (1-800-332-7563) Website: www.kaiserpermanente.org

If you are a **CONTRA COSTA HEALTH PLAN** member and your child needs medical assistance, call the Asthma Care Manager at (925) 313-6651.

COMMUNITY CLINICS

Community clinics offer medical assistance and health education for people of all income levels with asthma.

BROOKSIDE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER: (510) 215-9092

LA CLÍNICA DE LA RAZA: (925) 431-1259 Website: www.laclinica.org

ASTHMA INFORMATION RESOURCES

† ***COMMUNITY ACTION TO FIGHT ASTHMA:** provides advocacy and environmental policy action through a coalition that addresses asthma in West Contra Costa County. Community advocates provide outreach and education about reducing asthma and asthma triggers (West County only). For more information call: (925) 313-6764.

† **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY ASTHMA COALITION:** provides advocacy and policy action to address issues regarding asthma for all of Contra Costa. For more information call: (925) 313-6905.

† **TOBACCO PREVENTION PROJECT:** For information on tobacco ordinances and smoking cessation please call: (925) 313-6214.

† **HAZARDOUS MATERIALS OMBUDSMAN:** For questions regarding environmental issues or chemical releases please call: 1-877-662-8376.

REGIONAL ASTHMA MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION INITIATIVE: (510) 622-4438. Website: www.rampasthma.org

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION: 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872). Website: www.lungusa.org

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY: Environmental Information Center 1-866-EPA-WEST. Website: www.epa.gov

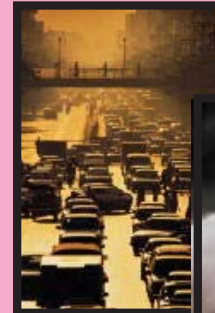
ASTHMA AND ALLERGY FOUNDATION OF AMERICA: 1-800-727-8462

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ASTHMA

What You Should Know What You Can Do



Asthma Warning Signs

CHILDREN AND ADULTS LOOK FOR:

WHEEZING – a high-pitched, whistling sound when breathing out (exhaling).

COUGHING – an unproductive cough (it doesn't clear mucus from the throat) that lasts more than four weeks. Coughing at night. A funny little cough that sounds as if you're clearing your throat.

SHORTNESS OF BREATH – feeling as if you can't breathe in as much air as you need. Panting heavily after exercise.

EXCESS MUCUS – airways are clogged by large amounts of thick mucus, which restricts breathing.

CHEST TIGHTNESS – chest feels as if it's been wrapped tightly. It's difficult to catch a full breath.

FATIGUE – tiring quickly, which can be caused by symptoms themselves, or because symptoms are interfering with sleep.

BREATHY SPEECH – inability to speak loudly or in full sentences.

IN INFANTS AND SMALL CHILDREN LOOK FOR:

- Rapid, noisy breathing
- Chest congestion, tightness
- Wheezing during a respiratory illness
- Coughing after running or crying, especially at night
- Sucked-in looking chest (between ribs, and at front of neck; a bare breast bone)
- Frequent respiratory infections such as pneumonia and bronchitis
- Shortness of breath

If you or your child has any of these symptoms, see your health care professional for an examination and diagnosis.

What Triggers Asthma Episodes?

Different things can trigger asthma episodes in different people. These "irritants" and "allergens" may not cause an immediate episode, but they build up in the system, and when there are enough, one of them will "trigger" an episode. Common triggers to watch for are:

ALLERGENS

POLLENS – most often in springtime, and worst between 5:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

OUTDOOR MOLDS – most plentiful in autumn
DUST MITES - found in bedding, upholstery, rugs, drapes. Thrive in humid environments

PETS & OTHER ANIMALS (INCLUDING RODENTS) – their fur or feathers, saliva and urine can all be triggers

COCKROACHES & THEIR DROPPINGS

INDOOR MOLDS – most common in bathrooms, basements, other damp areas of the house, and houseplants

HOUSECLEANING – can stir up dust, and cleaning products can be triggers

CERTAIN FOODS

IRRITANTS

PERFUMES – in soaps, cleaning products and laundry detergent, cosmetics and hair products

AIR POLLUTION

TOBACCO SMOKE

WET PAINT, GLUES AND SOLVENTS

FUMES & SMOKE – from gas, wood and kerosene stoves, heaters, & fireplaces

OTHER THINGS THAT CAN BE TRIGGERS:

COLDS & VIRUSES

COLD WEATHER

FORMS OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STRESS

EXERCISE

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Managing Asthma

**THE GOOD NEWS: ASTHMA CAN BE CONTROLLED!
PEOPLE WITH ASTHMA CAN CONTROL IT AND LIVE A HEALTHY, ACTIVE LIFE.**

Your health care provider will help you develop an **Asthma Action Plan** which will help you control your asthma and know what to do if you have an asthma episode. Using your plan will help you...

BE ACTIVE in exercise and sports without symptoms

SLEEP through the night without symptoms

PREVENT asthma episodes

HAVE THE BEST POSSIBLE PEAK FLOW NUMBER (lungs that work well)

AVOID side effects from medicines

ASTHMA ACTION PLAN

Your health care provider will show you how to use a peak flow meter to test the strength of flow of air through your passages, how to read the results (flow numbers) and what to do when the readings are in different zones (degrees of seriousness).

You may also have medication to take based on your flow numbers.

Your health care provider will help you identify your allergies and other triggers and learn how to avoid them. You can develop a **Trigger Control Plan** to help you avoid triggers, which can bring on an episode.

Keep open lines of communication about your asthma action plan with: Your family, workplace/child's school and daycare, and health care providers.

