



## Eliminating Environmental Asthma & Allergy Allergens In Schools

Asthma is the most common chronic children's disease; asthmatic children have sensitive airways that react to "triggers" or allergens, stimuli making their symptoms and asthma worse. The airways may become swollen, tighten up and produce excess mucus in the presence of triggers. It's important to identify allergens or triggers and learn ways to avoid them to make it easier for the children to breathe. Since everyone's asthma is different, it's important to know each child's triggers which can be done through an action plan, yet there are certain common triggers that should be avoided generally, especially in a school environment. Schools can help asthmatic children by eliminating environmental triggers that could harm their students.

### **Pollens and Molds (Outdoor)**

- ✓ Stay indoors during early to mid-morning hours when the pollen count is high  
<http://www.weather.com/activities/health/allergies/index.html> is one site to monitor Pollen Counts
- ✓ Keep windows closed during seasons when pollen and mold are highest (In Texas every month but December)
- ✓ Avoid sources of molds (wet leaves, garden debris). Monitor playing fields, nature walks, etc. for these triggers

### **Dust and Dust Mites**

- ✓ Avoid chalk dust, especially clapping erasers in a classroom
- ✓ Remove carpets that are laid on concrete
- ✓ Don't let children with asthma or allergies lie or sit on upholstered furniture
- ✓ Don't use aerosol dusting or cleaning products and avoid any scented cleaning products
- ✓ Damp-mop floors daily
- ✓ Use small washable area rugs rather than wall-to-wall carpeting
- ✓ If wall-to-wall carpeting can't be avoided, prevent children from putting their faces, nap mats, blankets, toys, or books directly on the floor
- ✓ Wipe window blinds or shades regularly to rid them of dust
- ✓ Store books, magazines, games in enclosed bookcases, closed boxes or plastic bags
- ✓ Avoid bringing stuffed animals/toys into the classroom
- ✓ Store supplies and paper products in closed cabinets; avoid piles of papers
- ✓ Avoid being in areas that are being or have recently been vacuumed

### **Indoor Molds**

- ✓ Keep bathrooms, locker rooms and basements well-ventilated to control humidity
- ✓ Clean bathrooms, locker rooms and basements regularly with bleach, but ventilate thoroughly
- ✓ Avoid live houseplants in the classroom as mold can grow on soil surfaces

### **Animal Dander**

- ✓ Dander or flakes are found in the skin, hair or feathers of all warm-blooded pets including dogs, cats, birds and rodents. (Hamsters and guinea pigs too). The allergen is in the saliva, urine and dander – the length of the pet's hair does not make a difference.
- ✓ Remove any furred or feathered animals from school
- ✓ If furred or feathered animals must be in the school, it may help to bathe them weekly
- ✓ Avoid field trips to places where there are animals (petting zoos, zoos)
- ✓ Follow the student's action plan to see which asthma medicine they might take before visiting places where animals are present (zoos, farms, etc)
- ✓ Choose a class pet without fur or feathers, such as a fish or a snake. Make sure their cages are cleaned regularly to avoid mold build-up
- ✓ Avoid products made with feathers, such as pillows and comforters. Avoid pillows and furniture stuffed with kapok – silky fibers from the seed pods of the silk cotton tree

### **Cockroach and Mice Allergen**

- ✓ Use roach traps under cabinets and sink areas
- ✓ Seal access points near pipes, windows, in bathrooms and showers
- ✓ Eliminate moisture or damp areas in showers, pool areas, under sinks, bathrooms
- ✓ Keep food in tightly sealed containers
- ✓ Set traps to catch mice
- ✓ If roaches, rats or mice are discovered, wash the area thoroughly after killing them

### **Strong Odors, Sprays and Latex**

- ✓ Do not stay in the school while it is being painted. Allow enough time for the paint to dry before returning to the building
- ✓ Staff should avoid wearing perfume, aftershave and perfumed cosmetics such as talcum powder, nail polish and hair spray. **Do not use room air or carpet fresheners at all**
- ✓ Use non-perfumed cleaning products and hand sanitation products whenever possible
- ✓ Reduce strong cooking odors (especially frying) by using a fan and opening windows
- ✓ Avoid using dry-erase markers with strong odors
- ✓ Make sure areas where chemicals are used in science experiments and/or art projects are properly ventilated to the outside
- ✓ Avoid using art supplies with strong odors or fragrance – permanent markers, paints or adhesives. Avoid flour based glues and using food products like macaroni in craft projects
- ✓ Be certain to clean all craft surfaces and tables thoroughly
- ✓ New furniture supplies made of pressed-wood or plastic laminate should be aired out before using (formaldehyde off-gases permeate these products)
- ✓ Avoid using office equipment that emit fumes (photocopiers, etc.) around children
- ✓ Avoid latex toys and balloons as many are sensitive or allergic to latex

### **Colds and Infections**

- ✓ Encourage people with colds or the flu to stay home while contagious (with fever)
- ✓ Wash hands properly & frequently so as not to spread germs, especially before and after eating
- ✓ Wash lunch tables before and after eating with warm, soapy water
- ✓ Make sure tissues are available and plenty of hand sanitizers
- ✓ Don't cover sneezes or cough with hands – use a tissue then dispose of it or the “Dracula” crook of the arm to cover sneeze and cough - hands transport germs

### **Weather**

- ✓ Pull a scarf or turtleneck over the child's mouth and nose in cold weather and on windy days when outdoors – breathing in cold air can affect the lungs and winds can be carrying dust and pollen
- ✓ Avoid outdoor recess on windy days, especially when weather is changing
- ✓ Avoid air pollution by staying indoors on days when the pollution count is high (see website above or another of your choice to check counts)
- ✓ Adopt an Ozone Alert policy: check ozone levels daily in warm weather and remain indoors on alert days <http://www.tceq.tx.us/compliance/monitor/air/monitor/ozone> is a good link
- ✓ Institute a Pollen Alert policy: check pollen levels and keep those children with pollen allergies indoors on high pollen days

### **Exercise**

- ✓ Follow the medication plan recommended by the child's healthcare provider before exercise or sports
- ✓ Warm up before and cool down after exercise or sports
- ✓ Listen to and observe the child with asthma during sports activities for any signs of distress

Remember: Making these changes will help keep asthma flare-ups from starting. An asthma management or action plan is an important part of controlling asthma. Let the school nurse and parent know if the plan is not working.