

## **SPORTS AND ASTHMA: Guidelines for Coaches and Phys Ed Teachers**

### **1) Change physical activities so they sync with each student's current asthma status.**

One in four kids may have asthma. Kids who follow their asthma plans and have well-controlled asthma can usually take part in vigorous physical activity. Remember, no matter what degree of control, sports or activities with long periods of hard and sustained activity like track, basketball, soccer, speed skating will more likely trigger an asthma flare-up or episode. Some kids with really well controlled asthma and in good physical condition can manage these activities but many can't. If a student exhibits asthma symptoms or is just recovering from an asthma flare, *modify their physical activity in type, length and frequency to reduce the risk of another flare-up.* Asthma medications should always be close at hand and if the student says they need them, they should be allowed to use them. Never wait.

#### **ACTIONS TO TAKE TO HELP PREVENT ASTHMA FLARE-UP DURING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

- Build in warm-up and cool down periods for all
- Check the student's management plan, if they have one, or speak with their parent or healthcare provider to see if they have any activity limitations
- If the student is just recovering from an asthma flare-up or is experiencing asthma symptoms, they're more vulnerable to another serious episode so take care and modify activity. Instead of running the whole track, allow alternating running and walking for example
- Know what triggers individual asthma symptoms and monitor your environment for triggers and consider changing locations temporarily if present. This will benefit all
- Don't isolate the student or bench them because they have asthma. Keep the students involved in some way – make them scorekeeper, timer, equipment handler, anything to keep them part of the group

### **2) Recognize asthma symptoms and take quick and appropriate action.**

Acute symptoms mean immediate action is required on your part to prevent a serious or life-threatening flare-up from starting.

#### **ACUTE SYMPTOMS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION**

- Coughing or wheezing
- Difficulty breathing
- Reported chest tightness or pressure
- A low peak flow meter score

When you see these signs, *follow the school's emergency action plan.* Be certain all staff, substitutes, volunteers and aides also know what to do in an emergency. These may be signs of exercise induced asthma and may resolve themselves in a few minutes or an hour or more, or not. Don't confuse those symptoms with the breathlessness (deep, rapid breathing) that occurs during normal aerobic exercise and quickly returns to normal.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO TAKE WHEN SIGNS OF ACUTE SYMPTOMS OCCUR**

- Stop the student's current activity
- Follow their asthma action plan. You should have a copy with you, not just in the school clinic
- Help them access and use their inhaler immediately
- Watch to see if these actions reduce or end their symptoms
- If the student doesn't improve, get emergency help ASAP
- Call 911 if you see any of these symptoms:
  - ⊗ The student is hunching over, with shoulders lifted, trying to breathe
  - ⊗ The student can't complete a sentence without straining for breathe
  - ⊗ The student's lips or fingernails turn blue

Reference source: NHLBI

Courtesy of

The Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas  
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