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**Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 15, Issue 12, #1 December 2008 HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

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**CFC to HFA SWITCH DEADLINE IS DEC. 31, 2008. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU IF YOU HAVE ASTHMA?**

\* Most asthma patients require two types of medication: quick-relief or rescue medications for emergency use (the albuterol drugs - quick acting bronchodilators) plus controller or preventative medications used on a regular basis to contain the disease and prevent flare-ups or exacerbations.

\* Quick-relief or **albuterol** medication is often in MDI – **Metered Dose Inhaler** – format which uses a propellant gas to deliver the medicine to the lungs. There are many brands of albuterol drugs. In the past, the propellant used for all of these and some other asthma medications was *chlorofluorocarbons* or **CFC's**. In 1978, scientists realized **CFC propellant**, which was also used in many aerosol products besides medications, (spray paints, hair sprays, deodorants, lubricants and foods to name a few) was **NOT safe for our environment** – CFC's were destroying the earth's protective atmospheric ozone layer located in the stratosphere (the part of the earth's atmosphere that begins about 10 to 15 kilometers above the earth's surface), even though CFC's were safe and effective for their medical uses. There was worldwide agreement to **phase out CFC use**. We've seen a rapid change for many products that used this gas, switching to pump spray aerosols for the majority of these products, but a pump spray wouldn't work for most asthma medications. There was again worldwide agreement that asthma medications would be exempt from the early CFC phase-out until a safe and effective alternative to CFC's for medical purposes was developed. That time came in **1996** when a **safe alternative propellant was developed – hydrofluoroalkanes or HFA's**.

\* An **FDA regulation ends the manufacture and sale of ALL CFC propelled albuterol medications**, no matter what brand, by **December 31, 2008** and other asthma medications using CFC propellants will eventually be phased out in the years to come. **What does this mean for you** if you use albuterol metered dose inhalers as quick relief medication?

\* It means that after the end of this month, you **won't be able to fill any old prescriptions** for metered dose albuterol that is propelled by CFC's. Healthcare providers have known of this phase out for the past two years and chances are anyone who's had a prescription written for albuterol in that time is already using the new medication propellant. It's important to remember, the **active ingredients, the medication itself, hasn't changed**. It's **only the delivery method**, or propellant that's changed. But if you have only mild intermittent asthma and perhaps haven't needed a new albuterol refill for a long time, you will **need to see your physician to get a new prescription** for the new albuterol. Of course, if you have old inhalers you can still use them until they expire but when you need a refill, it will be with the new format of HFA's.

\* It means the **cost for your metered dose inhaler albuterol will increase** since there is no generic alternative yet. There is a branded generic and you should ask your physician about that if finances are of concern to you. Eventually, in a few years, generic HFA propelled albuterol will be released.

\* It means that some might notice a **slight difference in the taste, smell or feel** of their medication because of the new propellant, but most do not. There is a **smaller particle size to the new delivered medication**. These smaller particles have lesser tendency to fall out of the upper airway and they penetrate into the small or distal lung airways better, a medication bonus. In other words, they're absorbed more effectively so **your albuterol will be more effective**.

\* It also means you might think you're not getting any medication when you use the new inhalers because of the smaller particles, but you are. **HFA inhalers deliver the medication mist with less force** and at a **warmer temperature**, with **less "blast effect"** than was typical in older CFC inhalers. The new albuterol has a softer taste.

\* It also means you'll have to devise a **new way to check medication levels** in your canisters. The new HFA inhalers **should not get wet** so the old float test to determine emptiness can't be used. Some of these inhalers have a dose meter, but most don't, so it's important to mark a calendar when you begin a canister to estimate when you'll need a refill. Most have 200 doses.

\* It also means you'll be more responsible for the medication canister. These HFA inhalers have a **tendency to gum up with medication residue over time**. You'll need to inspect these inhalers periodically; if you see white powder or other residue around the tiny medication spray hole then it is time to **clean the device**. To clean, remove the medication canister from the L-shaped plastic mouth piece, rinse the mouth piece in warm water and then dry completely before replacing the canister. Never get the medication canister wet! It is still recommended that children use a spacer with the new inhalers to channel the medication into their lungs rather than letting medication escape into the air. For more information on any asthma or allergy topic, contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org) or see our website [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org).

**With Gratitude and Thanks!** The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Texas provides free programs and services. We can because of the generous support from corporate education grants from Genentech, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Merck Pharmaceuticals, Sanofi-Aventis, AstraZeneca, Lincoln Diagnostics and GlaxoSmithKline.; foundation grants including William & Catherine Bryce Memorial Fund, The Adeline & George McQueen Foundation, The Leo Potishman Foundation, The Windham-Bartlett Foundation, The Lumry Family Foundation, The Prairieland Foundation; EPA & Aventis program stipends; community-sponsored fundraisers in our name; professional memberships; Tributes and Memorials to loved ones; individual, civic and corporate donations such as that from Colonial Country Club, the Nokia Golf Tournament and CFC campaigns. 93 cents of every dollar donated supports our free programs and services. To all these supporters we offer our gratitude and thanks! **We need your support**. Ask how you can help AAFA-TX provide services and programs free to the community. We are a 501 c 3 organization: contributions and grants may be tax deductible

**Upcoming AAFA-TX programs:** 1) Dec. 16, 7-8:45 pm SaferHouston Food Allergy Support Group meeting, Montgomery County South Reg. Library, The Woodlands, contact [dorin@saferhouston.com](mailto:dorin@saferhouston.com) 2) Jan. 29, 2009 "Tools to Manage Your Asthma & Allergies" worksite lunch and learn, Zale Corporate campus, Irving, TX. William Neaville, MD, instructor. 3) 2008-09 Merit Scholarship application available online. For more information, contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org)