

Dear Readers: This is the free newsletter of the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas Chapter. If you do not wish to receive other newsletters from AAFA-TX, please request we remove your address. To subscribe, email your request to [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org). Addresses are never shared. Thank you. Please add new sender's email ([joanhart@aafatexas.org](mailto:joanhart@aafatexas.org)) to your address book to ensure delivery. Welcome SAFER Houston, a food allergy, asthma and allergy support group affiliate of AAFA-TX.

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**PREPARE FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR IF YOUR CHILD HAS ASTHMA OR ALLERGIES**

\* Next month school resumes. For some kids, it's a time to look forward to, for others it's a time of dread. For children with allergies or asthma it can be a pleasant experience with some thoughtful preparations by all. We make these suggestions for a safe and healthy school experience whether your child is entering pre-school or high school.

\* 1) **Make a doctor's appointment before school begins** to assess your child's asthma control. Ask AAFA-TX for a free copy of an asthma action plan to take to your healthcare provider. They can list the current medication plan for your child while they assess asthma control. It may be necessary to change (step-up or step down) medications or dosages as the child grows or the severity of disease changes or control changes. Also ask them to complete a permission to carry meds form if appropriate. Ask us for a free permission form to have your healthcare provider sign.

\* 2) **Fill any new prescriptions.** Check that all old inhalers are full and ask your physician for a spacer to use with them. Spacers increase the amount of medication actually inhaled so the benefits of meds improves. **New HFA propelled albuterol inhalers act differently.** Ask us for more info on these new inhalers. Get an extra peak flow meter to keep at school; use labels to mark all medications and devices with your child's name.

\* 3) **Make an appointment with your child's new teacher** and give them the new action plan and permission form. Here's a tip: these forms are kept in the nurse's office; attach a small photo of your child to each form. Ask your child if they want to attend this meeting: it may empower them. At this meeting, **discuss your child's asthma or allergies with their teacher.** Clarify *what the teacher knows about asthma and allergies*. Discuss your child's triggers; if you feel your child is too young to handle their own meds at school, ask where medications will be kept – and how the child accesses them so everyone feels safe and empowered. Develop an emergency plan with the teacher and nurse and make sure the teacher knows how and when to use asthma devices if the nurse isn't available to help. Discuss how exercise and emotions effect the disease and perhaps your child's actions. This is also a good time to discuss any **side effects** asthma or allergy medications or the disease itself might have for your child. Some medications may make the kids hyper and others may make them drowsy. It's best that the teacher is aware that what might be considered a behavioral problem is actually a reaction to medications. Discuss the most appropriate way to deal with any of these side effects.

\* **Ask the teacher** 1) for make-up plans for absenteeism 2) if any other children in the class have asthma or allergies (this might help your child feel less singled out) 3) if the school is practicing a plan that eliminates the most common allergens from the school environment 4) AAFA-TX is a resource: recommend teachers, nurses and staff contact us to learn more about these diseases by checking our website ( [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org) ) or attending one of our programs 5) Middle school children and teens present another challenge. Peer pressure and the need to conform plus a basic teen belief in invincibility prompts kids of this age to ignore their medication plans and "loose" their inhalers. Fortunately, teens often show disease improvement after they hit puberty so their symptoms might fade or improve. Nonetheless, prepare an emergency plan with your child's teachers so they know what symptoms indicate a flare is coming. It is also important to discuss your teen's asthma with the **coaching and P.E. staff**, especially if your child participates in **competitive athletics**. **Serious flares**, even hospitalizations or death, **can occur when kids are training too vigorously in the wrong environment** such as extreme heat, days with high ozone levels, days when the pollen counts are especially high, winds are strong or practice sessions are held near congested highways exposing them to vehicle exhaust. Teens won't protect themselves so sometimes parents and teachers have to do it for them. Some athletes may need to use albuterol before or during sports. Discuss this clearly with the coaching staff. Do the coaching staff and nurse recognize the difference between an asthma flare and heat exhaustion, exercise fatigue or dehydration?

\* Does your child have **allergies that might be life-threatening (food, insect stings, meds)?** If at risk for anaphylaxis ask your physician for epinephrine auto-injectors, one to send to school, one to keep at home and ask AAFA-TX for a free Anaphylactic Action plan. Ask us for a free permission form allowing kids to carry their own injector on campus (with medical and parental permission). Discuss these allergies with teachers and school staff. Are teachers aware of the **symptoms of food allergy?** Mild symptoms can include: some itching in nose and throat; general skin itchiness; nausea; runny nose; runny and itchy eyes; earache; hives; diarrhea; rash. For some, even the scent of a food allergen or touching a hand or surface that touched their food allergen could cause more serious reactions of anaphylaxis. Ask what the school does to prevent **cross-contamination** of food allergens and if they have an anaphylactic emergency plan in place. Dangerous anaphylactic symptoms can include: severe swelling of mouth, throat and sometimes the whole face; severe airway swelling; restricted breathing; chest tightness or wheezing; fainting; recurrent earache; vomiting; recurring diarrhea. Anaphylactic shock is an emergency! Seek medical help. Ask us for more free information.

\* Become your child's advocate: help to empower both your child and the school with information. For more specific information, contact us at [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org) or refer to [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org)

**Upcoming AAFA-TX programs:** 1) **Aug. 17**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Ft. Worth, instructor Jeanette Arnold, MSN, CFNP. Pre-registration required. Ft. Worth ISD nurses are automatically registered. 2) **Aug. 24**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators, Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Maureen George, PhD, RN, AE-C, instructor 3) **Aug. 25** "Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies" worksite wellness program, Gulfstream Aerospace, Dallas, Eric Schmitt, MD, instructor 4) **Sept. 3**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Seattle, WA, instructor TBA. Pre-registration required. Seattle Public School nurses are automatically pre-registered. For more info or to register, contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org) or see [www.aafatexas.org/events](http://www.aafatexas.org/events)