

The Asthmatic At School

An average of one out of 10 school-age children has asthma, and those numbers continue to rise. Asthma is also a leading cause of school absenteeism, accounting for nearly 13 million missed school days per year.

It is important to establish positive two-way communication with your child's school personnel to ensure they fully understand the situation. Help the school personnel realize the main purpose in discussing your child's asthma is to keep school attendance as regular as possible, and to promote a positive learning environment. Discuss the difference between an acute episode that requires immediate attention versus whatever mild daily symptoms your child may have.

1. Provide a written list of triggers for your child's asthma. This can help the teacher in making plans for parties, activities, etc.
2. Provide a list of medications and how they are to be used, as well as possible side-effects.
3. Provide all the necessary medication, making sure it is well-labeled and current.
4. Provide a peak flow meter, as well as the ranges and indications for certain medications based on the child's Asthma Action Plan.
5. Demonstrate how the child will use his/her inhaler, spacer, nebulizer, or peak flow meter.
6. Let them know when you should be called, as well as when the doctor should be notified. Provide the phone numbers.

Also make the school personnel aware of when and why the child needs his/her medications before exercise. A short-acting rescue inhaler should be used at least 15 to 20 minutes before the type of activity that causes the asthma symptoms. If asthma is unstable and exercise should be restricted for a limited time period, alert the gym teacher. Remember that cold air in the winter time may suddenly worsen well-controlled asthma in children playing outside. In the summer, coming back inside from the heat to air-conditioning may trigger a similar response. Exercise is encouraged when asthma is well-controlled so that the asthmatic can build endurance. Being able to participate with peers and accomplish the same physical goals is important to the child's sense of self-esteem.