

Asthma



Asthma is a chronic lung condition that causes difficulty in breathing. People with asthma have extra sensitive airways. When the airways are irritated, they become narrowed or obstructed, making it difficult for air to move in and out. This can cause one or more of the following symptoms: wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath and chest tightness. Asthma affects students in varying degrees, from very mild to very severe. In students with severe asthma, symptoms occur more easily and more frequently. Severe or poorly controlled asthma can be dangerous; however, with adequate treatment, asthma usually can be controlled.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support this student's needs related to asthma. This could include finding out about:
 - the student's strengths, interests and areas of need
 - the student's specific symptoms
 - common triggers that need to be considered at school
 - successful strategies used at home or in the community that also could be used at school.
- In collaboration with parents and health care professionals, develop a written management plan that aligns with related jurisdictional policies and protocols and could include specific information, such as:
 - the role of school staff
 - when and what emergency measures should be taken.
- If the student is taking medication during the school day, discuss with the parents possible side effects. Follow school and/or jurisdictional policies and protocols in storing and administering medication.
- Work with the parents to carry out a risk assessment before field trips to determine potential hazards and to plan for the student's safe and successful participation.
- Collaborate with the parents and student to consider if, and how, they would like to share specific information about asthma with peers. If they wish to do this, consultation with health care providers, such as school or community health nurses, may be helpful.
- Learn as much as you can about how asthma may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to qualified professionals will build your understanding and help you make decisions to support the student's success at school.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student's condition and successful strategies.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student's parents.



Implications for Instruction

- Identify and take steps to reduce common asthma triggers in the school environment.
- Be aware that students with severe asthma may have numerous absences due to medical appointments or treatments, or fatigue.
- Develop a communication strategy between the home and school to stay informed about absences, and to keep the student and family connected to the classroom learning.
- Recognize that a student, who has been ill with asthma or has recently had an asthmatic episode, may need some time to work up to speed again. Adjust the workload, if needed, and provide appropriate academic and social supports.

Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels and different schools.
- Support the development of self-advocacy skills, such as teaching the students to ask for what they need. When possible, involve students in monitoring the success of supports and strategies used in the classroom.
- Consider a buddy system to support a student with asthma. If the student is returning to class after an asthma attack, the buddy can help out with missed work.
- If required, make adjustments to social activities, as necessary, to allow students with asthma to participate safely.
- Listen to students. Respond quickly if a student identifies the beginnings of an asthma attack.
- Recognize that the student may have dietary restrictions. Help the student feel included in the classroom by considering this when foods are served for special events or brought into the classroom.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



As you consider the implications for this medical condition, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's medical needs? Yes No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning?
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore? Yes No
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required?
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore? Yes No
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)?
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore? Yes No

Links for further information:

Allergy and Anaphylaxis Informational Response (AAIR).
<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/healthandsafety/air.aspx>
Asthma Society of Canada. AsthmaKids.ca. <http://www.asthmakids.ca>
Asthma Society of Canada. <http://www.asthma.ca/adults>
Asthma Society of Canada. "4 Seasons of Asthma."
<http://www.4seasonsofasthma.ca/index.php>
Canadian Anaphylaxis Readiness Education Online Training Program.
<http://www.learnalberta.ca> (search: anaphylaxis)

Please note:

These websites are for information only and the user is responsible for evaluating the content and appropriate uses of the information.

