



What should I do if my child has asthma symptoms?

If your child has symptoms of asthma, take your child to the doctor. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether a child who coughs and wheezes has asthma or another sickness. Only a doctor will be able to tell you for sure if your child has asthma.

The doctor will look at your child's:

- Medical and family histories,
- Signs and symptoms of asthma, and
- Physical exams.

The doctor may prescribe asthma medicine for your child. Depending on your child's medical history and condition, your child's regular doctor may also refer your child to an asthma specialist.

How can asthma be controlled?

Asthma can't be cured, but it can be controlled. Adults with asthma and the parents of children with asthma should take three important steps:

1. Know what triggers your asthma or your child's asthma and avoid these triggers.
2. Ensure that you or your child take all asthma medication as prescribed by a doctor.
3. Have an Asthma Action Plan. This is a written plan that describes a person's asthma triggers, the names and doses of asthma medicines to be taken, and what to do during an emergency. Work with your doctor or your child's doctor to develop an Asthma Action Plan. If your child has asthma, be sure to share this Asthma Action Plan with his or her school nurse.

For a blank copy of an Asthma Action Plan or for more information about asthma, contact the Health Information Line at 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711 or visit www.health.ri.gov/asthma

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways. The airways are the tubes that carry oxygen in and out of the lungs. When someone with asthma is exposed to an asthma trigger, their airways can become swollen or inflamed and the muscles of the airways can tighten. These changes can limit the flow of oxygen into the lungs and make it hard to breathe.



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The main **asthma triggers** in a home are dust mites, molds, pollens, pets, cockroaches, and household irritants. Secondhand tobacco smoke may also be a trigger in a home, especially for a child with asthma.



Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled. Controlling asthma is very important. Taking asthma medications as prescribed and avoiding asthma triggers can help a person with asthma avoid an **asthma attack**, which is a sudden worsening of asthma symptoms. Asthma that is not well-controlled can result in emergency room visits, hospitalizations, loss of school and work days, and a lower quality of life.



What are the symptoms of asthma?

When someone with asthma is exposed to an asthma trigger, they may have some of the following symptoms:

- Wheezing (breathing with a whistling sound)
- Coughing, especially during the night or in the morning
- Chest tightness or chest pain
- Shortness of breath



What should I do if I have asthma symptoms?

If you have symptoms of asthma, see your doctor.

Your doctor will:

- Talk to you about your medical and family histories,
- Listen to your breathing,
- Test you for allergies, and
- Look for other signs of asthma.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you have any of the problems listed below. They can be associated with asthma.

- Runny or itchy nose
- Trouble sleeping or exercising
- Heartburn
- Psychological stress

Additional testing may be necessary to know if you have asthma. Your regular doctor may refer you to an asthma specialist.

Who can get asthma?

Asthma affects people of all ages, but it usually starts during childhood. A number of things may affect whether or not someone develops asthma.

These may include:

- Family medical history
- Allergies or eczema (a skin condition)
- Exposure to certain viruses or allergens that you breathe in early in childhood (some of these allergens include dust, pollen, mold, and pet fur)
- Exposure to tobacco smoke, especially in childhood

