



Fact Sheet

Asthma

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic health condition due to swelling and spasms in the airway which results in coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. The frequency of asthma has been increasing over the past decade, and currently around 1 in 20 children suffers from asthma. Youth and young adults can die from untreated or poorly treated asthma. The main goals for treatment are to allow the individual to have full activity without limitations and to keep the asthma symptoms under control.

How Can Asthma Affect a Teen at School?

In addition to coughing, wheezing and breathing difficulties, youth with asthma may experience tightness in their chest. Severe asthma attacks can result in generalized fatigue and/or decreased alertness, which can impact their educational performance. Triggers for an asthma attack can include exercise, cold air, airborne irritants (e.g., tobacco smoke, hair spray, cologne, cleaners), allergens (e.g., dust mites, pollen, or cats), viral illnesses (colds), menstrual cycles, and emotional stress. Some youth with severe asthma may be eligible for special education support under the category of Other Health Impairment.

How Do We Work with Youth with Asthma at School?

There are two types of medicines for control of asthma: “rescue inhalers” and “controllers.” Rescue inhalers (short-acting bronchodilators) should be used at times of asthma symptoms. Controller inhalers (such as inhaled steroids and long-acting bronchodilators) should be used every day to prevent asthma symptoms. Youth should be asked and be able to express an understanding of how to use their medication.

Students with asthma should each have an Individualized Health Plan at school that addresses their daily schedule such as when to take their medicines and how to monitor and treat their symptoms. It should also identify a plan for the school to follow when the

Continued, page 2





Asthma

Continued from page 1.

daily school schedule changes or when the youth does not feel well. It should specify when staff should contact parents and 911. It is important to include an “asthma action plan,” which gives direction to address different levels of symptoms. For youth with Transition Plans, the Health Plan should specifically include discussion of the youth’s self-management of the condition. This would include keeping a “rescue inhaler” with them throughout the school day and monitoring when they use it.

Signs of severe difficulty breathing include grunting with very fast breathing; appearing anxious; being unable to speak in full sentences without stopping to catch breath; or looking limp, blotchy or bluish. If any of these signs are present, staff should enact the youth’s individual emergency plan. ♦