

Asthma in babies and children

Asthma is a common lung condition that can affect your child's breathing.

If your child is having an asthma attack

In case of an emergency, follow these steps:

1. Stay calm as this will help your child stay calm - breathing can become harder if they are stressed.
2. Sit them up straight and do not let them lie down.
3. Ask them to take slow breaths.
4. Connect their face mask or spacer device to their reliever inhaler (this is usually blue).
5. Give them a puff of their inhaler every minute. Children under the age of 6 can have 6 puffs in a 10-minute period. Children over the age of 6 can take 10 puffs over 10 minutes.

Call 112 or 999 if:

- their symptoms have not improved after 5 to 10 minutes

Repeat step 5 every 10 minutes until the ambulance arrives

If your child is having an asthma attack, stay with them. Do not leave them on their own even for a short time.

Take the details of your child's inhalers, other medicines and personal [asthma action plan](#) with you if you go to hospital.

Symptoms

Symptoms of asthma can include:

- coughing
- wheezing or noisy breathing
- tightness in the chest

- shortness of breath
- soreness in the tummy
- tiredness
- difficulty speaking
- irritability or changed mood
- not wanting to take part in active play

Most of the time your child may have mild symptoms or none at all.

Occasionally symptoms can suddenly get worse. This is called an 'asthma attack'.

Symptoms of a severe asthma attack can include:

- coughing or wheezing
- chest feeling tight
- being too short of breath to finish a sentence
- being too short of breath to eat, drink or speak
- breathing faster
- lips turning blue
- feeling drowsy, confused, exhausted or dizzy

Causes

Asthma is a common condition in children. It is caused by swelling of the small airways (breathing tubes) in the lungs. This causes the tubes to become narrow, making it hard to breathe. It also causes more mucus to be produced, which can cause your child to cough.

Your child is more likely to have asthma if other members of your family have asthma.

Other conditions can also increase the risk of asthma, such as:

- hay fever
- eczema
- food allergies

Asthma attack triggers

The following things can trigger an asthma attack:

- infections
- allergies
- exercise
- pollution
- cold air

Smoking around children or at home can trigger an asthma attack. Traces of smoke on hair and

clothes can also make your child's asthma worse. Do not let anyone smoke in your home or around your child.

[Get help to quit smoking](#)

Diagnosing and treating asthma

Take your child to your GP if you think they have asthma.

Your GP will ask some questions and listen to your child's chest. They may also need to do some tests, where your child will need to blow into a device that measures their breathing or airflow.

Children under 5 are often not able to do the breathing tests properly. Your GP might offer treatment without doing a breathing test if your child is under 5 and has symptoms.

Treatment

Inhalers are usually prescribed to treat asthma. Inhalers are devices that allow small amounts of medicine to be breathed into the lungs. This treatment is usually very effective.

There are two main types of inhaler:

- reliever inhalers
- preventer inhalers

Reliever inhalers

Reliever inhalers relax the muscles around the breathing tubes during an asthma attack. This allows airways to open, making it easier to breathe. Most reliever inhalers are blue.

If your child needs their reliever inhaler more than 3 times a week, they will usually need a preventer inhaler too.

Preventer inhaler

These inhalers prevent your child's symptoms from appearing and reduce the risk of long-term problems. Most use a small dose of steroids.

Preventer inhalers work gradually over time. They will not relieve sudden attacks.

Your child should use their preventer inhaler every day, even if they are well, or it will not work.

Your GP or GP nurse will show you how to use the inhaler. They may give you an asthma action plan. This explains what to do during an asthma attack.

Face masks and spacer devices

Most young children will be prescribed a face mask which attaches to their inhaler. Older children will be prescribed a 'spacer device'. A spacer device is a plastic or metal container with a mouthpiece and

a hole for the inhaler.

If your child has been prescribed a face mask or a spacer device, it is important to always use these. Face masks and spacers are the best way of making sure that your child gets the correct dose of medicine directly to their lungs.



A child using a spacer device

Make sure you help your child to use their inhalers correctly. Ask your GP or your GP nurse to show you if you are not sure.

Other treatments

Your child might also be given other types of treatment.

Steroid medicine

Your GP might prescribe a short course of steroids. Steroids can help calm down your child's inflamed airway and help the reliever inhaler to work. Short courses of steroids are safe for your child and do not have any long-term side effects.

Leukotriene receptor antagonists

These are preventer tablets that may be prescribed along with, or instead of, a preventer inhaler.

Further treatment

If your child's asthma is severe they may be referred to an asthma nurse, consultant or asthma clinic for further treatment.

GP visits

Children with asthma will be assessed regularly to check:

- their symptoms
- their medicine
- they're using their inhaler correctly

Your GP or GP nurse will usually assess your child 3 months after they are first diagnosed. Your child will have annual checks until they are 6 years old.

Asthma tends to be a long-term condition. Some children with asthma can 'grow out of it' in their teens. But it can come back when they are adults.

Asthma Action Plan

Your GP or GP nurse can also help you develop an Asthma Action Plan for your child.

An asthma action plan is a plan written especially for your child. It will have all the information you need to help to control your child's asthma. It will also have instructions on what to do if:

- your child's asthma is getting worse
- they have a cold
- they have an asthma attack

Download an [Asthma Action Plan \(PDF, 348 KB, 2 pages\)](#)

Make sure that anyone looking after your child knows where their asthma action plan is.

Complications from asthma

Although asthma can normally be kept under control, it's a serious condition that can cause a number of problems.

This is why it's so important to follow your child's treatment plan. Trust your instincts. Always bring them to your GP if you feel they are getting worse.

Badly controlled asthma can cause problems such as:

- feeling tired all the time
- missing school or not doing well in school
- stress, anxiety or depression
- lung infections (pneumonia)
- delays in growth or puberty

There's also a risk of severe asthma attacks, which can be life-threatening.

Choosing childcare

Make sure your childcare provider understands your child's asthma.

It is a good idea to leave a reliever inhaler and spacer device at your child's childcare. Make sure the childcare provider knows how to give your child their inhaler.

You might need to change your childcare if:

- your child is allergic to certain pets, and your childminder or creche has this type of pet
- anyone in your child's childcare will be smoking around your child

Coping with school

Make sure the teachers know your child has asthma. Give a reliever inhaler and spacer device to your child's teachers.

Put one of each in their bag too, especially as they get older. This means they can take it whenever they need to.

Make sure the teacher knows if your child needs to take their inhaler before exercise. It's also a good idea for your child to bring their inhaler with them on school tours.

Sports and activities

Encourage your child to be active and take part in all their usual sports and activities if their asthma is under control.

Taking other medicines

Check with your GP or pharmacist to make sure other medicines are suitable before you give them to your child. This includes over-the-counter medicines.

Vaccines

Get your child the [flu vaccine](#) every year and make sure their [childhood vaccinations](#) are up to date.

More information

[Children and asthma - asthma.ie](https://www.asthma.ie/children-and-asthma)

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