



First aid fact sheet

Asthma emergency



An asthma emergency can be life-threatening. If there are symptoms of an asthma emergency then call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance, early.

- Most people are aware of their asthma and should have an action plan and medication, usually in the form of an inhaler.
- If the patient's inhaler is not available, in an emergency you can use another person's inhaler or one from a first aid kit (where permitted under local state or territory regulations).
- If the patient is having difficulty breathing but has not previously had an asthma attack, follow What to do.
- If someone with known asthma and allergy has sudden breathing difficulties, always **give adrenaline first**, then the asthma reliever.

Signs and symptoms

Mild to moderate

A patient experiencing a mild asthma attack can walk and speak in short sentences or phrases in one breath.

Their symptoms can also include:

- increasingly soft to loud wheeze
- persistent cough
- minor to obvious difficulty breathing

Asthma emergency

- symptoms get worse
- very quickly
- little or no relief from inhaler
- severe shortness of breath, focused only on breathing
- unable to speak normally
- pallor, sweating
- progressively more anxious, subdued or panicky
- blue lips, face, earlobes, fingernails
- loss of consciousness

What to do

- 1 Follow DRSABCD.
- 2 Help the patient to sit down in a comfortable position. Stay with the patient and calm and reassure them. If asked, help the patient to follow their asthma action plan. If necessary, help the patient to use an inhaler, their own if available.

How to give medication

- 1 Shake the inhaler before giving initial puffs. Use a spacer if available.
- 2 Give 1 puff of the blue/grey reliever puffer and take four breaths. Repeat until 4 puffs of the reliever have been given – 1 puff at a time with 4 breaths after each puff.
- 3 Wait 4 minutes. If the patient still cannot breathe normally, give 4 more puffs as above.
- 4 If the patient still cannot breathe normally, **call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance. Say that this is an asthma emergency.**
- 5 Keep giving 4 puffs every 4 minutes (as above) until medical aid arrives.

For further information see Asthma Australia: asthma.org.au

In a medical emergency call Triple Zero (000)

DRSABCD Danger ► Response ► Send for help ► Airway ► Breathing ► CPR ► Defibrillation

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