1. Welcome

Asthma is the most common long term medical condition in children. It cannot be cured, but with appropriate management quality of life can be improved.

The purpose of this guide is to enable schools, schoolteachers and school nurses to highlight concerns about a child with asthma, and assist with any issues or questions they may have around administering emergency medicine.

According to Asthma UK, 1 in 11 children in the UK have asthma making an average of three children in each classroom, therefore we cannot underestimate the major role that schools play in making these children’s environments asthma safe, assisting their medical care, and promoting acceptance and understanding for the condition.

WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN WITH ASTHMA

London asthma standards for children and young people have been developed and provide a helpful guide on what all agencies should be striving for to ensure improvements are made.

The standards and aspirations for London are available in our online toolkit.

Through the asthma friendly schools programmes, clear effective partnership arrangements are in place between health, education and local authorities for management of children and young people with asthma within primary and secondary schools.

This includes the adoption of government policy on emergency inhalers and early years settings, such as:

- Children’s centres having access to education programmes for the wheezers.
- Children and young people have an individual healthcare /action plan in place.

It also means that schools should have the following in place:

- Register of all children and young people with asthma.
- Management plan for each child.
- Named individual responsible for asthma in each school.
- Policy for inhaler techniques and care of the children and young people with asthma.
- Policy regarding emergency treatment.

System for identifying children who are missing school because of their asthma or who are not partaking in sports / other activities due to poor control.
2. How can schools help?

Asthma is common, can lead to absenteeism and poor academic attainment, but it is controllable and schools can play an important role in asthma care. Appropriate asthma care is necessary for a child’s immediate safety, long-term well-being and optimal academic performance.

An effective school-based asthma management program should allow children with asthma or allergies to participate in all school learning and recreational activities with few restrictions and will ultimately help to minimise school absences. There are a number of examples already in existence in Australia, New Zealand and America. Links are available in the online version of this toolkit:

- [asthmaaustralia.org.au](http://asthmaaustralia.org.au)
- [asthmafoundation.org.nz](http://asthmafoundation.org.nz)
- [lung.org](http://lung.org)

We know from recent research that innovative use of whole-school education using school nurses or medical students can improve the health of children with asthma and structured asthma reviews in schools may improve clinic attendance in adolescents. A study by Salisbury et al (2002) achieved 91% attendance by holding asthma reviews in a school setting compared to 51% for practice-based review.
AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

Parents need to feel confident that schools can care for their child with asthma whilst children must not feel stigmatised or singled out because of their condition. Whole school interventions are useful and may include practical actions, homework, competitions, sport or art based activities.

Further information regarding the benefits of commissioning school based programmes can be found in ‘Designing and commissioning services for children and young people with asthma: a good practice guide (2013)’ available on the Primary Care Commissioning website.

DAILY SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT

It is a legal requirement to document all medications administered (Supporting pupils with medical conditions, 2014). Wherever possible schools should record each time a child or young person uses their salbutamol inhaler.

If it is noted the child has used their inhaler three or more times a week than is stated on their care plan their parent or guardian should be notified and advised to take the child for a review with their health care provider.

EMERGENCY CARE

A child or young person with asthma may become seriously ill without any previous record of a serious episode. All members of staff need to be aware that they must call emergency services when in doubt or concerned that a child or young person is in danger. Delay could prove to be life-threatening. One person should call 999 and remain on the line to give information about the child’s condition and the school’s postcode.

A 999 CALL SHOULD BE MADE IF:

- the child is unusually struggling to breathe
- the child has difficulty talking and is breathing very rapidly
- the symptoms of breathlessness and wheezing are worsening despite the use of medicines
- the child has lost or is losing consciousness
- the child is experiencing severe chest pain
- the child has blue lips or fingernails.

It is best to err on the side of caution and call 999 when there is any doubt about the child’s asthma attack. Parents should be called after the 999 call has been made and not before. The school should have a clear protocol about medical emergencies which will cover adults as well as children.

Clear guidance which can be shared with all school staff has been developed by the Whittington Hospital and is available to download online.

Download the Whittington Health T.I.M.E. diagram. This poster demonstrates what to do in an emergency.

ACCESS TO INHALERS

A child’s own Inhaler and spacer will ideally be kept in the classroom or as near as possible to the child. Older children should carry their own inhaler. All staff and children and young people should be familiar with the whereabouts of inhalers and spacers.

EMERGENCY SALBUTAMOL INHALERS IN SCHOOL

Recent Department of Health legislation requires schools to hold emergency supplies; a useful document is available online for schools about support for children with asthma during an asthma attack at school and storage of reliever inhalers.

Visit Gov.uk for more information about
emergency inhalers at school

Emergency kits should be held in central locations within the school. A kit should be available for PE, school trips and evacuation of the school. Additional emergency kits may be required if the school building is several stories high. More helpful resources are available in our online toolkit

USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES AND TOOLS TO HELP WITH PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES

Asthma registration template with flag system

Pharmacy Guide for Supply of Salbutamol Inhalers to Schools

EXERCISE

Numerous studies have shown the importance of increasing the ability to exercise safely in schools to reduce consultations, medication use and absence from school.

Additionally schools should develop systems where the school alerts the family and primary care when children are failing to take part in school activities such as sport which could indicate deterioration in their asthma.

INFORMATION FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND COACHES

– Exercise can cause acute shortness of breath for many students with asthma particularly in cold dry air and during activities that require extended running.

– Know what to do if an asthma episode occurs during exercise.

– Have the child’s Asthma Action Plan available. And encourage them to keep their reliever inhaler (usually blue) with them at all times, but especially when exercising.

– Medicines can be taken before exercise to help avoid an episode.

– Warm-up and cool-down activities may also help.

– Be aware that outdoor exercise when pollen or pollution levels are high can exacerbate the condition.

– These preventive measures allow most students with asthma triggered by exercise to participate in any activity they choose.

– Encourage students with asthma to participate actively in sports, recognising and respecting their limits.

– Know the warning signs and symptoms for asthma. Tell someone, who can get help immediately, if a child is having an asthma attack. Detailed information about asthma attacks are available from Asthma UK.

– Encourage the child to stop exercising if they get any asthma symptoms (a tight chest and/or breathlessness, coughing, wheezing), and ensure they take their reliever inhaler and wait at least five minutes after symptoms have gone before starting again.

– Permit less strenuous activities if a recent illness or asthma episode precludes full participation.

– When asthma is under good control, students with the disease are able to play most sports. A number of Olympic and professional athletes have asthma.

– Refer your questions about a student’s ability to fully participate in physical education to the parents and school nurse. If you notice a reduction in exercise levels and an increase in symptoms or need for the student to use their inhalers more after exercise inform their parent or suggest they see the GP.
4. Useful resources and tools

ASTHMA POLICIES FOR SCHOOLS

Healthy London Partnership in conjunction with the asthma friendly team in Islington has produced a document to enable schools to manage children and young people with asthma effectively in the pre-school, early years, primary and secondary school setting. It is available online or on request.

Other example school policies are available on the internet or via Asthma UK.

Background information about the Asthma Friendly Schools is available from a presentation from Nickola Rickard via our website.

The Health Conditions in Schools Alliance is an organisation made up of 30 organisations and charities that provide a range of guidance and tools for schools online at medicalconditionsatschool.org.uk

Schools are legally required to have a medical conditions policy in place for children with asthma. Find out more on the Department of Health’s website.

Healthy London Partnership has produced Supply of Salbutamol Inhalers to Schools – A detailed Pharmacy Guide to this process is available online.

SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE

The Education for Health Charity has a range of online resources for raising awareness on how to support children and young people with asthma.

Whittington Health and NHS Islington Clinical Commissioning Group has developed a School Asthma Plan which could be adapted and used.

Ealing children’s asthma project worked with 62 schools and 2000 children and their families teaching them about asthma and how to manage it correctly. They brought emergency department admissions down by 40% and demonstrated £90k savings. You can learn more about this initiative online ersjournals.com; jcn.co.uk

NHS Islington has been piloting an asthma friendly schools project based on the work done in Ealing. Through their healthy schools programme initiatives they have included a competition around smoking cessation linked to Stoptober as well as the appointment of a school nurse to run their asthma friendly schools programme and community nurses running clinics with primary care. A range of helpful resources including the Asthma Friendly Schools (ASF) Business Proposal, Schools Service Specifications and a Job Description for Paediatric Asthma Nurse are available to download via our online toolkit.

Business proposal Asthma Friendly Schools

Asthma Friendly Schools service specification

Asthma Friendly Schools Job Description

The Well at School website has been developed to support children affected by a medical or mental health condition while they are in school.

TRAINING

Ideally a whole school approach to training similar to the Speak Up For Asthma programme or asthma friendly schools approach in Islington should be offered to schools, this may include an assembly for students, coffee morning/afternoon for parents which coincides with drop off or pick up times for parental convenience and access to an asthma specialist or school nurse for advice. All staff – teachers/administrators and support staff – should have training that includes practical inhaler technique.
NHS Whittington and NHS Islington have shared sample slides used for briefing students and to support teacher training for asthma care. They can be downloaded from our online toolkit.

- Assembly for students
- Training for teachers

**VIDEO RESOURCES**

A number of videos and interactive resources are available online including:

- Greater Manchester Inhaler Technique Improvement Innovation Project
- NHS choices asthma in children
- American Sign Language video; Information about Asthma
- What is asthma by Dr. Alex Thomas
- What to do in an Emergency kids with asthma by Dr Alex Thomas
- Dr Ranj Singh uses Peppa Pig to help treat a young boy suffering an Asthma Attack

**FUTURE RESOURCES AND TOOLS**

**ASTHMA BOARD GAME**

Queen Marys University of London have produced an asthma board game complete with triggers, which will be available shortly and an app is planned for launch in the summer. For further information please contact:

Dr. Gioia Mosler, g.mosler@qmul.ac.uk

Katherine Harris: k.harris@qmul.ac.uk