



# Living Well Newsletter

A monthly e-publication provided by Esse Health

## Preparing Your Family for Fall Allergy Season

by Dr. Matt Dougherty, Esse Health Pediatrician

As summer slowly fades to fall, parents and children are diving into the new school year- school supplies are bought; notebooks, pencils and laptops are readied. But for the many children who are affected by asthma, seasonal changes and illness exposures that come with starting the new school year is a part of school readiness that cannot be overlooked.

Preparing a child with asthma for the school year starts with knowing the signs and symptoms that may indicate his/her asthma may be worsening. Coughing and wheezing are often the first symptoms present with an asthma attack (also known as an exacerbation). This cough is often described as dry and may worsen in the night or early morning hours, although the symptoms can be present at any time during the day.

Another important aspect of controlling your child's asthma is to know what events are most likely to trigger your child to have a worsening of his/her asthma, oftentimes known as a "trigger." Once these triggers are known, a family can focus on preventing the exposure if possible or preparing for the exposure if not.

Although there are many, some common triggers for asthma are as follows:

- Environmental conditions: these include pollens in the air (which often peak in spring or fall depending on what allergens trigger

the symptoms in a child), mold in the home, or changes in temperature, particularly when weather changes from warm to cold.

- Upper respiratory infections or "colds": children with a history of asthma should treat colds with asthma medications rather than over-the-counter cold medicines.
- Exercise: this can be a common trigger for many children. Make sure your child's pediatrician knows if you suspect that exercise worsens his or her symptoms of asthma.



Once a child has been diagnosed with asthma, there are several steps that can be taken to try to minimize or control the worsening of symptoms that can occur periodically. The first and most important of these steps is becoming educated about the disease of asthma itself. When a family knows and understands this condition, they can take the steps necessary to prevent an exacerbation or, if one occurs, begin treatment with the correct medicines at the correct time. At the end of this article are several resources to teach families about asthma, but feel free to contact your child's doctor with any questions or concerns you may have. Your doctor might

encourage you to see a specialist, like our friends at Gateway Asthma & Allergy Relief.

Another step that can be taken to control the symptoms of asthma is to know how to properly monitor a child's breathing status and the severity of symptoms when they do occur. Some methods that are used to do this include an asthma diary in which a family records symptoms and medications used; the use of peak flow meters, which helps to measure how affected the child's airways is by his/her asthma at a given period of time; and having an asthma action plan in place, which outlines what treatments should be given and when. Not all of these plans are appropriate for every patient- discuss with your pediatrician which ones are appropriate for your child based on his/her age and the severity of their asthma.

Another important step that should be taken is to understand the differences between the various medications used to control asthma. These medications can be divided into two main categories: rescue medications and controller medications. Rescue medications, such as albuterol, are used for quick relief of symptoms when a child is having an exacerbation. It is very important that all families of a child with asthma have a non-expired supply of these medications in the home that can be given very quickly if symptoms develop. The other group of medications are the controller medications, used in patients with a more significant history of asthma. These medications are used every day, even if a child is not currently having symptoms. Never stop these medications without discussing this with your child's doctor first- remember, your child may be doing well with his/her asthma control because of these medications. Stopping them may trigger a worsening in your child's symptoms.

To have the safest and healthiest school year, the family of a child with asthma should be armed with knowledge of the disease of asthma, have an asthma action plan in place, have prescriptions filled, and know how to use the medications and monitoring devices, if necessary. For families of a child with asthma, these steps are as important as any in preparing a child for the school year.



Dr. Matt Dougherty is a Pediatrician at Esse Health's  
Tesson Ferry Pediatrics Office  
13303 Tesson Ferry Rd., Suite 150  
St. Louis, MO 63128  
Phone: (314) 842-5239

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