

PHYSICAL EDUCATION FACULTY AND STAFF

A diagnosis of asthma does not necessarily mean that students should restrict their participation in sports or other physical activity. While some students may require modified physical activity, this is often not the case.

Students with asthma may feel isolated or left out as a result of activity avoidance. This can result in low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and teasing by classmates. Students with asthma should be included in physical activity whenever possible.

Modifications for physical activity involvement may include decreased intensity or length of involvement, or consideration for the type of activity planned. These modifications may be especially helpful if the student has recently experienced an acute asthma flare-up.

Exercise Induced Asthma is a condition where airways become constricted in response to activity (bronchoconstriction). Exercise is a common trigger of asthma, and should be recognized and

understood by all school staff. Symptoms of Exercise Induced Asthma may include wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and/ or shortness of breath both during and after exercise. Other symptoms can include fatigue or chest congestion. Not all people with Exercise Induced Asthma have chronic asthma.

The severity of Exercise Induced Asthma is dependent on the type and duration of physical activity involved. A student's individualized health plan may include guidelines for physical activity. This information should be readily accessible for coaches, physical education instructors, and recess monitors. Frequent symptoms of asthma during exercise may indicate that asthma is not adequately managed, and the school nurse should be notified to communicate this information to the student's parent and/or provider.

Adapted from: Asthma (2001, Vol 6, No. 2). Management of Exercise-Induced Asthma: Helpful Hints for Sports Coaches. Reviewed by Asthma Ready® Communities Staff (2010).

ACTIONS FOR THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR AND COACH

Help Children with Asthma and Their Families Manage Asthma

- **Follow the student's asthma action plan.** Support the student's treatment plan if it requires pre-medication before exercise. Know how to easily access the action plan. Consult with the school nurse for clarification.
- **Appreciate that exercise can cause episodes for many students with asthma.** Exercise in cold, dry air and activities that require extended running appear to trigger asthma more readily than other forms of exercise. However, medicines can be taken before exertion to help avoid an episode. This preventative medicine enables most students with to participate in any sport they choose. Warm-up and cool-down activities appropriate for any exercise will also help the student with asthma.
- **Be sure that the student's medications are available** for exercise activities that take place away from school or after regular school hours.
- **Keep students' quick relief medicines readily available.** Even with precautions, breathing problems may occur. Learn the signs of severe distress and allergic reactions. Have an emergency plan. Don't delay getting medical help for a student with severe or persistent breathing difficulty. Encourage exercise and participation in sports for students with asthma.
- Maximize participation and minimize the risks by **establishing good communication** among parents or guardians, students, health care providers.
- **Encourage exercise and participation in sports for students with asthma.** When asthma is under good control, most students with asthma are able to play most sports. A number of Olympic medalists have asthma, including Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Olympic gold medalist in track and field; Amy Van Dyken, Olympic gold medalist in swimming.
- Encourage students with asthma to participate actively in sports but also recognize and **respect their limits.** Plan to adjust the type, pace, and intensity of activities during extreme weather, the pollen season, poor air quality, or when the student has allergy symptoms or a peak flow number lower than usual. Permit less strenuous activities if a recent illness precludes full participation.

Source: Managing Asthma: A Guide for Schools. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), National Institutes of Health, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. September 1991; Revised July 2003. NIH Publication No. 91-2650. Reviewed by Asthma Ready® Communities staff (2010).