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Facts on Asthma

* Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects your airways, which are the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways are inflamed. The inflammation makes the airways very sensitive and tends to react strongly to things your body finds irritating or allergic to.

Allergies are the immune system's response to foreign substances called allergens that the body thinks are harmful but really are not. The body responds by producing antibodies that trigger the allergic reaction. When the airways react, they get narrower and less air flows through your lung tissue. This causes symptoms like wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and trouble breathing. Asthma cannot be cured, but for most patients, it can be controlled and you can live an active life. No one should ever die from asthma.

* Children with Asthma

Asthma symptoms in children can vary. It is vital that parents learn how to recognize symptoms. Look for coughing episodes, especially at night, or with exercise. Children will often complain of a sore throat, coughing that lasts a long time, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Every person in a child's life plays a role in keeping that child healthy.

* Asthma Symptoms

- *Increased shortness of breath or wheezing
- *Frequent coughing or sneezing
- *Runny nose and watery eyes
- *Disturbed sleep or waking at night due to coughing or wheezing
- *Chest tightness or pain

Asthma signs and symptoms can range from mild to severe. All asthma attacks give a warning.

Learn to recognize warning signs and treat them early to prevent symptoms from becoming worse.

* What Causes Asthma Attacks?

It is not clear exactly, however new research suggests exposures early in your life may be important.

There are many common things that can worsen your asthma symptoms. The list below gives some examples of asthma triggers.

Allergens

- Animal dander (hair, skin, or feathers of animals)
- Dust mites
- Cockroaches
- Pollen from trees and grass
- Mold (indoor and outdoor)

Irritants

- *Cigarette smoke and fireplaces
- *Air pollution, smog, ozone
- *Cold weather
- *Perfumes
- *Paints
- *Medications

Although it may be impossible to eliminate all triggers, the best strategy to minimize exposure is avoidance, maintaining medical therapy, and consulting with a doctor.¹

* Facts About Asthma

*Thirty-eight percent (6 of 16) of adults who died of asthma were current smokers, which is a higher percentage than the general population of adults (31.4% of 18-24 years olds and 26.3% of 25-34 year olds) according to preliminary estimates from the 2002 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey.

*Twenty-five percent (1 of 4) of children smoked and 40% (2 of 5) were exposed to smoke at the home.²

Basic Asthma Facts in Connecticut

*7.9% (202,000) of adults and 8.9% (75,000) of children in Connecticut reported to have asthma in 2001.

*The highest rates of asthma were seen among those in the lowest income group (less than \$25,000).

*Each year in CT, there are approximately 6,000 emergency department visits for asthma among children ages 0-14 years.

*Asthma hospitalization rates for black and Hispanic children in CT are consistently higher than the rate for white children.

*Each year in CT, approximately 50 people die from asthma.³

* Asthma in the United States 2001

*Prevalence: The prevalence of asthma has increased dramatically since 1980, particularly among children. Asthma is the most common chronic disease of childhood and the number one cause related to absenteeism in schools.

*Quality of Life: Suboptimal asthma care causes about 7.5 million avoidable sick days each year.

*Pharmacy: The majority of people with persistent asthma in Medicaid or commercial health plans in 2002 filled at least one prescription for a long-term asthma control medication (62.8% and 67.9% respectively).

*Physician Office Visits: Asthma visits were 1.4 percent of all visits to physicians' offices in 2001.

*Hospitalizations Due to Asthma: The 2001 hospitalization rate due to asthma was 16.0 per 1000.

*Rates are higher in children under age 15 than adults 15 years or older. Rates were significantly higher among blacks than whites.

*Mortality: Over 4200 people died from asthma in 2001, including 513 who were under the age of

*35 at the time of their death.⁴

* Medications/Treatments for Asthma

There are four main types of medicines for asthma:

*Quick Relief medicines give rapid, short-term treatment and are taken when you have worsening asthma symptoms and to prevent asthma attacks. You will feel the full effects of these medicines after taking them for a few weeks. People with persistent asthma need long-term medicines within minutes. (i.e.: short acting inhaled bronchodilator)

*Long-term Control medicines are taken every day, usually over long periods of time, to control chronic symptoms and to prevent asthma attacks. You will feel the full effects of these medicines after taking them for a few weeks. (i.e.: inhaled corticosteroids)

*Immunotherapy or allergy desensitization shots. These decrease your body's sensitivity to a particular allergen.

*Anti-IgE monoclonal antibodies. These are designed to prevent your immune system from reacting to allergens.⁵

* Prevention

- *The best way to prevent asthma attacks is to identify and avoid allergens and irritants.
- *Recognize, reduce and control your asthma

- *Develop an action plan. Write a detailed plan, outlining medications and emergency contacts.
- *Monitor your breathing and treat attacks early. In an emergency, always seek medical advice.⁶

*According to information gathered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2000 and 2001:

- *31.3 million Americans say they were diagnosed with asthma. This is up 26 million in 1997.
- *12 million has an asthma attack in the last 12 months.
- *9.2 million are under the age of 18.
- *4.2 million of these young people also had an asthma episode in the past 12 months.
- *Asthma accounted for 4,487 deaths in 2000, down from 5,000 in 1997 and 4,657 in 1999.

*Asthma strikes across all ages, sex, and racial groups

- *Asthma is more prevalent among blacks and Hispanics than whites.
- *Blacks are two and one half times as likely as whites to be hospitalized for asthma.
- *More than twice as many blacks die of asthma as whites.
- *More women die of asthma than men.
- *asthma is also more prevalent among children than adults.

*Asthma and Children

- *Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease.
- *For children between the ages of 5 and 17, asthma is the number one cause of school absences due to a chronic illness.
- *10 million school days are lost each year because of asthma.
- *Children with asthmas are restricted to bed an estimate 7.3 million days per year.

*Annual Asthma Costs

- *Each asthma sufferer experiences an average of 11.7 days of restricted activity.
- *Asthma is the fourth leading cause of work loss.
- *Adults lose millions of workdays each year.
- *Asthma accounts for 10.4 million visits to the doctor's office.
- *1.8 million emergency room visits are due to asthma.
- *Asthma patients accounted for 465,000 hospitalizations in 2000.
- *According to the American Lung Association, the overall cost of asthma in 2000 was \$12.7 billion. Direct medical costs accounted for \$8.1 billion and indirect costs for lost productivity totaled \$4.6 billion.

***The Healthy People 2010 Objectives for asthma**

- Reduce hospitalization rates for pediatric asthma.
- Reduce asthma deaths.
- Reduce hospitalizations for asthma.
- Reduce emergency department visits for asthma.
- Reduce activity limitations among persons with asthma.
- Reduce the number of school or workdays missed by persons with asthma.
- Increase the proportion of persons with asthma who received formal patient education.
- Increase the proportion of persons with asthma who receive appropriate adult care.

Overall, when it comes to children and their asthma, parents are their child's best advocates. They really need to take on the role and responsibility of making sure that their child is safe at home, school or in their community. Managing asthma can be quite challenging and it often takes ongoing teamwork with doctors, school personnel and other people in contact with your child. Monitor your child's breathing. Make sure you recognize the signs of an impending attack, such as coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath. Then treat attacks early. If you act quickly, you are less likely to have a severe attack. Immediately stop or remove yourself from any activity that may have triggered the attack. Always seek professional help if symptoms do not improve.

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