

Email-based program for creating asthma-friendly schools

In order to provide a concise and focused supplement to the Wisconsin Asthma Coalition's school and child care walkthrough program, we are excited to introduce the new S.A.F.E. program! Program participants will receive 10 free emails throughout the school year (August - May). Each email will contain a brief educational nugget on asthma along with some corresponding "quick-win" action steps. Participants will also have a chance to receive asthma supplies for their school!

Sign up for the program here or scan the QR code below. Please share this easy new e-mail program with your local school communities so we can make our schools asthma friendly!



August
Back-to-school with asthma

What is asthma?
Asthma is a chronic (or long-term) disease that can't be cured, but it can be controlled. The airways of someone with asthma can become swollen, tight and filled with mucus. This can cause wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and coughing.





An asthma attack happens when the airways are irritated by triggers. Common asthma triggers include:

- Air pollutants (smoke, car exhaust, chemicals, strong odors)
- Allergens (mold, dust mites, pollen, animal dander)
- Exercise
- Respiratory infections (colds and flu)
- Strong emotions (stress, anxiety, laughing)
- Weather (cold, dry air and changes in humidity)

Reducing a child's exposure to these triggers is key to controlling asthma!

How can you help?
Here are steps you can take to create an asthma-friendly learning environment:

- Watch this 3 Quick Tips video (only 2 minutes long!)
- Read 10 Things Teachers Should Know About Asthma sheet (helpful for all school staff!)
- Team up with your co-workers at school. Be sure they sign up to receive these emails, too! **Working together** makes creating asthma-friendly schools easier and more fun.

Want to learn more? Email Program Leader, Carissa Hoium, MPH to schedule an in-person walkthrough, a virtual meeting or a professional development session for staff at your school.

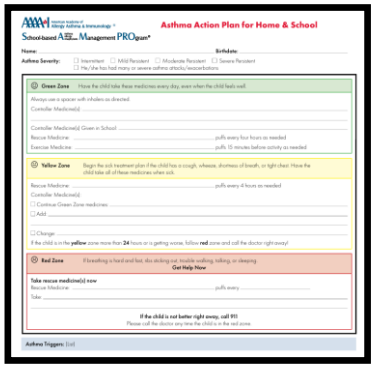


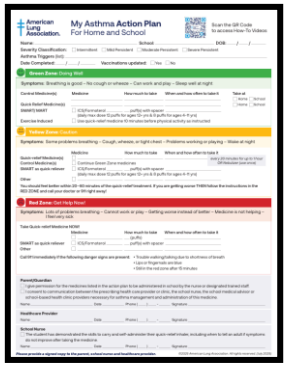
September
The importance of asthma action plans

What is an asthma action plan?
An asthma action plan (AAP) is an important tool for asthma control. It is developed by the student's physician and is a personalized guide to managing that child's asthma!

AAPs outline how and when the child should take their asthma medication and what to do if asthma symptoms get worse while at school. They may also list the child's individual asthma triggers. Knowing each child's asthma triggers helps school staff avoid those triggers when possible.

Many AAPs are designed to look like a stoplight. They explain what to do when the child's asthma is in the green zone (asthma is doing well), the yellow zone (caution: asthma is getting worse) and the red zone (danger). Below are some examples:





Using a student's asthma action plan is key to controlling asthma!

What can you do?
Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- Set up an annual meeting for the school nurse and staff to review student AAPs **together.** Each child's asthma is unique!
- Make sure each student with asthma has an AAP on file at school. Currently, fewer than half of students with asthma have plans on file. Work with your team to set a goal (e.g., "We will obtain AAPs for 75% of students diagnosed with asthma this school year").
- Contact parents and physicians to stress how important it is to have a copy of the child's AAP for your records.

Working together, we can increase the number of AAPs in schools!

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October

The air inside our schools

What is in the air in our schools?

Schools are unique places. They need large numbers of children (and school staff) to spend time together in small spaces. When pollen, dust, germs and other air pollutants are floating around in the air of those small spaces, this can lead to health and learning issues. These issues include fatigue, headaches, allergy and asthma symptoms, poor school work and the spread of illness like the flu.

Many things affect the air quality in our schools:

- **Actions of students and staff** inside (and outside of) the school.
- **Air flow** system and upkeep.
- **Location** of the school.
- **Products used** inside the school.
- **Temperature and humidity** levels inside the school.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that up to 50% of all schools have indoor air quality issues. Luckily, there are steps we can take to improve the indoor air quality in our schools!

Did you know? October is National Indoor Air Quality Awareness Month!

What can you do?

Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- **Schools should have their air flow systems checked each year.** During the school year, be sure to alert the facilities or maintenance staff if you notice an issue with moisture, odors, pests or air flow in your classroom. The EPA and American Lung Association provide **free tools** for schools.
- **Check your classroom space for common asthma triggers** and then make simple, low-cost changes to reduce them. Use the Wisconsin Asthma Coalition's school walkthrough guidebook and checklist (found under Asthma Resources for Schools) on our website.
- **Use fans and air purifiers in your classroom.** You can even build a DIY box air cleaner!

Working as a team, we can improve the air quality in our schools!

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November
Animals and asthma

How do animals affect asthma at school?
Thinking about a classroom pet? Animals can be great teaching tools in the classroom; however, pets can be an asthma trigger. Asthma can be triggered by the skin flakes, urine, feces, saliva and hair shed by warm-blooded mammals.

Even if you don't have an animal present in your classroom, some students bring their family pets with them to school in the form of hair and skin flakes on their clothing, backpacks and other personal items! If a child with asthma (who is triggered by pet hair) sits next to a child wearing a sweatshirt covered in cat hair, this can cause asthma symptoms and get in the way of learning.

What can you do?
Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- **Select fish or other cold-blooded animals for your classroom.** Remember to keep the tank or habitat well maintained to avoid moisture issues since that can lead to other asthma triggers.
- **Know which of your students have asthma and learn what their triggers are.** This information can often be found on their asthma action plan. If a student is having frequent allergy or asthma symptoms in your classroom, take note of where that student is sitting. Quick fixes to seating arrangements can make a big difference!
- **Use an air purifier in your classroom.** Air purifiers with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters can remove pet allergens from the air.

Can you believe it's been three months since school started? Time for some quick-wins in November!

- **Dust and dust mites:** Check for any areas collecting dust. Wipe down surfaces with a wet cloth. Wash any fabric items in hot water
- **Moisture and pests:** Check the classroom for any standing moisture and signs of pests (e.g., droppings, dead pests)
- **Remove any scented items from the classroom**

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December
Odors and asthma

How do odors affect asthma at school?
Strong odors and scents contain a lot of concentrated molecules. When breathed in by people with asthma, the molecules can cause airways to close and trigger an asthma attack. Strong odors and scents found in schools can come from sources such as chemicals, cleaning products, perfumes, cologne, air fresheners and second- or thirdhand smoke.

What can you do?
Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- **Restrict odor-producing items in your classroom.** These items include air fresheners, diffusers, candles and potpourri.
- **Choose the least toxic and most environmentally-friendly cleaning products.** Don't forget to consider the time it takes for fumes to clear after cleaning products are used! Use cleaning products when students are not present in the classroom.
- **Create a scent-free policy at your school.** Scent-free policies prohibit staff and students from wearing strong scents at school. A thirdhand smoke policy prohibits staff from smelling of smoke when at school. Educate families about student hygiene.

Reducing and removing odors in your school requires a group effort. Working together, you can create an asthma-friendly environment!

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January

Pests and asthma

How do pests affect asthma at school?
Pests are common in schools, especially in winter when they seek warm places! Pest waste and saliva contain proteins that can cause allergic reactions or trigger asthma symptoms in those sensitive to these allergens. Pests in a school can be caused by poor food handling, food storage and moisture problems. Cardboard boxes and old food that is not thrown out will attract pests.

What can you do?
Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- **Check for pest droppings, urine, decaying body parts and skin.** These are signs of pests in classrooms.
- **Use an integrated pest management (IPM) system.** The best approach to managing pests in a school is to use IPM. **The key to an IPM system is to remove the sources that attract pests instead of relying on pesticides.** IPM prevents pests by:

  1. Watching for signs of pests.

  2. Keeping food, water and garbage contained.

  3. Removing areas for pests to enter the building and take shelter (e.g., sealing any holes in walls, ceilings or floors and disposing of cardboard boxes).

  4. Using control products such as traps, pesticides and baits only as needed and allowed by law. Toxic chemicals (pesticides) used to manage pests can be harmful to people. Management methods that pose less risk to children and adults in the school should be used first!

The key is to avoid removing one asthma trigger (pests) by using another asthma trigger (pesticides)! Working together, we can implement asthma-friendly systems in our schools.

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February

Mold, moisture and asthma

How does mold affect asthma at school?
Molds are fungi that grow on moist surfaces. Mold exposure can lead to breathing issues, allergic reactions and asthma attacks. All types of mold can be dangerous, and moisture is the most important concern when addressing the growth or spread of mold in the school environment.

Please note that to ensure the safety and health of everyone in the school, it may be necessary to contact a professional contractor who is qualified to respond to mold and moisture issues. The Environmental Protection Agency provides resources relating to mold cleanup, which can be found at www.epa.gov/mold.

What can you do?
Here are steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

- **Check for the following signs of excess moisture:**
  - Leaks in the roof or plumbing.
  - Humidity or condensation.
  - Damp or cluttered areas near sinks, appliances and other water sources.
- Moisture sources in schools vary. **Policies may be put in place to prevent and reduce potential moisture problems.** Below are recommended solutions for each moisture source.
  - Appliances:
    - Require trays or pans underneath to catch any residual water.
    - Place appliances away from carpeting.
    - Create a policy that prohibits personal refrigerators and other cooking appliances in the classroom.
  - Plants:
    - Limit the number of plants.
    - Use water trays to collect excess water.
    - Require regular maintenance of plants.
    - Create a policy that prohibits plants from classrooms.
  - Sinks:
    - Identify the source of moisture and fix the issue.
    - Replace carpeting by sink area with hard flooring.
  - Ceilings and walls:
    - Clean mold from surface and dry surface thoroughly.
    - Identify source of moisture and fix the issue.

- Bathroom facilities:
  - Clean bathrooms regularly.
  - Remove standing water on sinks and floors.

Addressing potential problems before mold growth can occur is best. Working together, we can implement asthma-friendly policies in our schools.

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March

Outdoor air quality and asthma

How does outdoor air quality affect asthma at school?
Outdoor air pollution can be an asthma trigger **and is unhealthy for all kids**. Even those without asthma! Kids' bodies are still growing (including their lungs), and they breathe in more pollution than adults, so it is important to pay attention to local air quality.

Pollution sources include exhaust from cars, trucks, buses, construction sites, industrial sources and fires. It is important to note that **kids are not only exposed to outdoor air pollution while playing outside**. Outdoor air enters schools through cracks and gaps in windows, doors and vents.

6 steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school

1. **Check air quality daily.**
    - Visit www.airnow.gov.
    - Many weather apps include air quality.

2. **Alert staff to protect student health when pollution levels are high.**
    - Avoid exercising or playing outdoors.
    - Avoid opening windows.
    - Keep quick-relief asthma medication on hand if students are active outdoors.

3. **Remind parents and caregivers to turn off their engines while dropping off or picking up students.**
    - Idling vehicles give off higher levels of harmful air pollution.
    - Encourage families to walk, bike or carpool to school.

4. **Use air cleaners to keep indoor air clean.**

5. **Talk to your school administrators about creating plans to protect student health when air quality is poor.**
    - Here are some templates you can use!

6. **Learn about the Love My Air Wisconsin program.**
    - Visit www.chawisconsin.org/air.

- Email Program Manager, Sarah Kroening, MSpEd.

Clean air is important for kids so they can breathe easy and stay healthy at school. Working together, we can reduce exposure to unhealthy air.

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April

Viruses, emotions, weather and asthma

How do viruses, emotions and weather affect asthma?
Some lesser-known asthma triggers include viruses, emotions and weather. Viruses like colds and the flu can affect the lungs, making it harder for a child with asthma to breathe. The child may experience wheezing and chest tightness when they have a virus.

Big emotions like stress, anxiety and even laughing can trigger asthma too. These emotions can change breathing patterns and tighten the muscles in the chest, leading to coughing, wheezing and even asthma attacks.

Weather can also cause asthma flare-ups. Cold, dry air or changes in humidity can bother the airways and trigger asthma symptoms.

Steps you can take to help create an asthma-friendly school:

1. **Viruses are hard to control in school settings, but there are ways to prevent their spread.** Clean high-touch surfaces often and encourage frequent handwashing. Remind students to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze and remind parents of the school's sick policy.
2. **Be mindful of big emotions in students with asthma.** Practicing deep breathing, helping the child calm down in a safe space and talking about feelings can all help!
3. **Be mindful of weather changes.** Remind a child with asthma to cover their mouth when the air is cold outside to help protect the airways.

Being aware of lesser-known asthma triggers can help kids breathe easy and stay healthy at school. Working together, we can help take control of asthma.

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May

Wrapping up the school year

Recap of Schools with Asthma-Friendly Environments (S.A.F.E.) program emails
The emails sent over the past 10 months aimed to increase school staff understanding of environmental asthma triggers. These triggers can **negatively affect students** by impacting performance and increasing absences due to asthma, which can lead to lower grades. Creating a more asthma-friendly school environment **helps all students learn and thrive!**

As a recap, here are the asthma triggers we focused on this year:

- Animals
- Odors
- Pests
- Mold and moisture
- Poor indoor and outdoor air quality

We also covered the importance of asthma action plans since every child's asthma can be different. If you missed any of the 10 monthly emails, you can find them all here.

Thank you for your dedication to helping create an asthma-friendly school! Please help us grow this program by taking these steps:

1. **Tell your colleagues about the S.A.F.E. program.** We encourage all school staff to sign up! Everyone can benefit from this information.
2. **Take this quick six-question survey.** Let us know if this program increased your knowledge about asthma and what we can improve!

Thank you for being aware of asthma triggers to help kids breathe easy and stay healthy at school. Working together, we can help take control of asthma.

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