



Supporting children and students with asthma in Ontario

Promoting child and student well-being is one of the four key goals in “Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario.” Ensuring the health and safety of children and students with medical conditions requires a partnership among families, members of the school community and community partners, including health care professionals.

Asthma overview

Asthma is a common chronic (long-term) lung disease that can make it hard to breathe. People with asthma have extra sensitive airways, that when triggered can tighten up, become swollen, produce extra mucus and make it hard to breathe.

Different people have different asthma symptoms, which can change over time and vary depending on the situation. Common asthma signs and symptoms include:

- shortness of breath
- wheezing (whistling sound from inside the chest)
- difficulty breathing
- chest tightness
- coughing

Asthma facts

- Asthma is typically managed with inhalers or “puffers.”
- Asthma can be fatal. In 2013, 259 Canadians died from asthma (100 in Ontario).
- Asthma is most common during childhood and affects at least 13% of Canadian children.
- Over 2 million Ontarians have asthma, including one out of every five children.

Living with asthma

Asthma can't be cured. It is always present even when symptoms aren't. However, asthma can be managed, so that individuals can enjoy a full and active life. In consultation with a health-care professional, an asthma action plan should be developed. This plan outlines:

- What types of medications your children should take;
- Teaching your children to know when their asthma is starting to get out of control and when it is an emergency and what to do in an emergency; and
- Changes to the medications your child takes when having asthma symptoms.



Creating an inclusive environment at school

All children with asthma — no matter how independent they are — need the support of trusted, caring adults at school and elsewhere.

[Ryan's Law](#) requires all district school boards and school authorities to develop and maintain a policy to support students with asthma.

Ongoing communication between the school, the student and the family is essential, beginning when a student is diagnosed and starts school. Maintaining an open exchange of information is also important throughout the school year, especially if there are changes to their medical condition.

Families should work with the school to create an individualized Plan of Care for their child. The plan will include support strategies or ways to accommodate the students so that they can participate to their full potential in school activities.

The Ministry of Education expects all district school boards and school authorities in Ontario to develop and maintain policies to support students with asthma, anaphylaxis, diabetes and epilepsy in schools.

Emergencies

In the case of an emergency related to asthma, school staff should refer to the child's individualized Plan of Care. This plan has information about the child's emergency asthma medication, where it is kept, and when it should be used. In an emergency, the child should be taken to the hospital as soon as possible.

In all emergency situations:

1. Stay calm.
2. Immediately use reliever inhaler (usually a blue inhaler).
3. Dial 9-1-1.
4. If the symptoms continue, use the reliever inhaler every 5 - 15 minutes until medical help arrives.
5. Inform the emergency contact, as identified in the student's Plan of Care.

The [Lung Association Managing Asthma Attacks poster](#) has general instructions to follow when asthma symptoms increase or become severe.

If a child has asthma and is also at risk for anaphylaxis and it is unclear which emergency the child is experiencing:

1. first give epinephrine (e.g., EpiPen®) and dial 9-1-1 for an ambulance,
2. then give the reliever inhaler (usually a blue inhaler) as indicated above.

Where to find more information

Asthma Canada:

<https://www.asthma.ca>

The Lung Association – Ontario:

www.lungontario.ca/resources

www.ryanslaw.ca

Lung Health Information Line: 1-888-344-LUNG (5864)

Ryan’s Law:

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/15r03>

Healthy Schools, Ministry of Education:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/medicalconditions.html>

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