



Triggers in School

Are there things in your child's school that could be worsening their asthma symptoms?

The answer is yes. Triggers are things in your environment that cause asthma symptoms to worsen. Things to be aware of are:

Indoors: Allergic Triggers

Animal Dander: Any furred animal can produce airborne antigens that trigger airway inflammation in those allergic. All furred animals shed dander. There is no such thing as a 'non-allergic' animal. If your child is allergic, talk to the teacher about making your child's classroom pet-free. Animal dander can also be brought in on other students clothing and transferred to upholstered furniture and carpets in the classroom. Encourage your school to have non-upholstered furniture and remove carpeting where possible.

Dust mites: Dust mites can be prevalent in carpeting, pillows and upholstered furniture. Encourage the use of furniture that has a smooth surface, so it is easily wiped clean.

Mould: Moulds can be found both inside and outdoors at school. Indoor molds can grow in damp areas where there is very high humidity, or standing water, particularly if moisture is left for greater than 24 hours. Moulds are found in swimming pools, activity mats, washrooms, damp dark places with little ventilation. Examine your child's classroom for moisture as well as mold growth, and report any concerns to the principal.

Indoors: Non Allergic Triggers

Airborne particulate: Chalkboard dust can be a problem. Your child should not clean the blackboards or chalk brushes. Many schools are changing blackboards to dry erase boards. Encourage teachers to use scent-free markers.

Odors and fumes: Strong odors from paint and cleaning products, markers, perfumes and potpourri can worsen asthma symptoms. Encourage your child's school to use scent-free products.



Viral Infections: Respiratory viral infections (the common cold) are one of the most common and powerful trigger for airway inflammation in children with asthma. The best way for your child to protect him/herself is to practice good hand washing techniques and to implement the steps written in your child's Asthma Action Plan.

Outside: Allergic Triggers

Mold spores can also be found outside in decaying leaves, composts and wood piles. Exposure can occur on field trips that increase exposure to mould, such as apple orchards, or hikes in the woods.

Pollen: Pollen can be a trigger at school the school year as well. If your child is allergic to pollen, it may be helpful to keep classroom windows closed when pollen counts are high as well as to discourage outdoor activity during these times.

Outside: Non Allergic Triggers

Air Pollution: Diesel exhaust from school buses and smog alert days are too obvious triggers. Encourage bus drivers to turn off their engines when idling. Have the students with asthma sit at the front of the bus. Cancel or reschedule outdoor activities on smog alert days.

Weather changes: Weather conditions such as thundershowers in the spring, cold, dry days in the winter, or a hot humid day in the fall can cause problems for those with asthma. When extreme weather conditions exist cancel any outdoor activity.

Other triggers:

Exercise: Exercise is an important part of healthy living for your child, and should be encouraged. However, if the underlying condition is not well managed, exercise can be a trigger for asthma attacks. Having the asthma under good control is the first and most important step in reducing the possibility of asthma symptoms with exercise. However, if your child still experiences symptoms during physical activity at school, talk to your doctor about pretreating with a reliever medication. Performing 10 – 15 minutes of warm up prior to strenuous exercise may also be helpful. **If there are any asthma symptoms prior to physical activity, your child should not participate.** Talk to your child's doctor, get the asthma under total control and then encourage the child to fully participate.