

COVID-19 & Asthma

The COVID-19 virus can be particularly troubling for those with asthma. It's important for asthma sufferers to know that they are not at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19. However, people with asthma need to be especially diligent in protecting themselves from the virus through measures such as handwashing and staying away from those who are sick. Symptoms of COVID-19 may be more severe and may lead to poor outcomes for those with asthma. People with asthma need to continue taking their prescribed medications to prevent exacerbations of their asthma.



“Now more than ever it is important for people with asthma to take their maintenance inhalers to control inflammation that may be occurring in the lungs,” says Michael E. Wechsler, MD, a pulmonologist and director of The Cohen Family Asthma Institute at National Jewish Health. He advises asthma patients who are taking oral corticosteroids to continue taking them as their physician prescribes. “It’s vital for patients with asthma to reduce airway inflammation and minimize risk of exacerbations as much as possible.”

Dr. Wechsler also says that it is important to recognize different asthma triggers and to know when asthma symptoms are getting worse. This can help patients identify when to call the doctor if they’re getting sick. Asthma patients need to follow their physician-prescribed asthma action plan or ask for a plan if they don’t have one.

Mask or No Mask?

Guidelines for wearing a mask continue to evolve. While wearing a mask may not keep asthmatics from getting COVID-19, it’s important to wear a mask if:

- you are coughing or have other new respiratory symptoms
- you have been exposed to someone who may have COVID-19
- you have a household member who is sick
- you are a health care worker

Extra Precautions for People with Asthma

There are simple precautions Dr. Wechsler strongly suggests taking to avoid contracting COVID-19. “I’m telling my patients to avoid crowds and people who are sick and to eliminate all nonessential contact with people. They should also wash their hands frequently.” Data also suggest that COVID-19 can survive on surfaces, such as plastic and metal for up to 72 hours. Clean surfaces frequently and use caution before and after contact.

“Now is the time for maximum hygiene and minimal personal interaction,” said Dr. Wechsler. “Continue asthma medications, maintain social distancing or stay home, and follow an asthma action plan.”

Nebulizer Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Using a nebulizer to treat conditions such as asthma is very valuable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, its use comes with a variety of issues.

Nebulizers aerosolize droplets from the airways, which are then spread into the air. This allows viruses or other microbes to be transmitted by the nebulizer. “The risk of infection spread by droplets is actually increased during nebulizer treatments because the nebulizer may send droplets further than they would naturally go through breathing,” said Dr. Wechsler.

When a person with asthma uses a nebulizer, no one else should be in the room. If others need to be in the room, they should wear a mask or other protective equipment.

Despite these risks, Dr. Wechsler recommends continuing nebulizer use to maximize asthma care, but urges users to clean them before and after each use. Microbes can collect in the nebulizer if the device isn’t cleaned properly.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

© Copyright 2020

NOTE: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

National Jewish Health is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 119 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit njhealth.org.