

## Avoiding the September Epidemic

---

AUGUST 15, 2009

DENVER — Most people associate cold-and-flu season with the cold, dark days of late fall and winter. But as soon as children are confined in classrooms and start swapping germs, the incidence of respiratory infections rises sharply. Colds due to rhinovirus peak in September, with other viral infections also increasing. While this poses a problem for all parents, it is especially hazardous for parents of children with asthma.

Viral infections cause more than 80% of asthma attacks in children and more than half of all asthma attacks in adults. Asthma attacks requiring hospitalization are so frequent in September that the "September epidemic of asthma exacerbations" is a recognized phenomenon. A quarter of all children hospitalized for an asthma attack are admitted in September. Below are several tips to help parents of children with asthma prepare for the new school year.

**Asthma Action Plan.** Ask your doctor for a written [Asthma Action Plan](#) for the school. This plan should include what medicine to use to treat asthma symptoms and changes in peak flow zones, what medication to use as a pretreatment before exercise, emergency telephone numbers and a list of things that make your child's asthma worse.

**Meet with school staff.** Plan a meeting with school staff before or in the beginning weeks of the school year. It is helpful to have the school nurse, health aide, teacher and physical education teacher at the meeting. Your child also can be involved in the meeting. Take the written Asthma Action Plan to the meeting. Review the Asthma Action Plan, use of the [peak flow meter](#), medicines and things that make your child's asthma worse.

**Special school supplies.** Keep a peak flow meter, spacer and rescue medicine at school for your child. Make sure the rescue medicine has not passed its expiration date. Takes these items home at the end of each school year.

**Gym class.** Make sure your child has a pretreatment for gym class or other physical activities, especially outdoors in cold weather.

**Field trips.** Asthma should not keep your child from participating in an off-site field trip. Be prepared to take medicines along to use for flare-ups.

**Medication side effects.** Studies have shown that asthma medicines typically don't cause concentration problems. However, if a child who receives high doses of medicine during an episode may experience side effects, such as restlessness and trouble concentrating.

**Keep in touch.** Continue talking with your child and school staff about managing asthma at school on a regular basis, even if everything is fine at school. Talk with the school staff if your child misses school and assignments.

**When to stay home.** Talk with your child's doctor about when it is okay to stay home from school because of asthma or illness. Mild asthma symptoms can usually be handled at school but there are a number of factors (what triggered the asthma, the stability of peak flows, fever, how much medicine your child is taking, etc.) to consider when deciding whether to keep your child at home

**National Jewish Health** is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 124 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 the media resources page.

## Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

**Jessica Berry**  
303.398.1082  
berryj@njhealth.org