

# Paediatric asthma surge in February – help your patients be back-to-school ready

The National Asthma Council Australia is asking doctors to help their young asthma patients have a great start to the school year by ensuring their healthy return to the classroom.

Parents and carers need to be prepared so they and their kids with asthma are confident about managing their asthma and allergies before the new school year begins.

There's a well-documented annual increase in children's asthma flare-ups during February, immediately after school goes back.

Studies in Australia and the UK show that asthma hospitalisations surge during the first month of the school year, with cases in Australia tripling in children aged five to 14 years and doubling in pre-schoolers. While increased risks have also been recorded at the start of subsequent school terms, the February spike is by far the most significant.

National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson and respiratory paediatrician, Professor Adam Jaffé, said that the one in 10 Australian children with asthma often have symptoms at school.

“At the start of the school year factors such as stress, shared viruses, less strict asthma management over the holidays and a change of environment or allergens can trigger asthma in children and teenagers.

“The impact of these asthma flare ups, including missed school days, can be reduced if children and their parents and carers are properly prepared.

He urged doctors to check their paediatric patients' asthma, including ensuring that patients are taking their preventer medications as prescribed, reviewing their device technique and ensuring their asthma action plan is up to date.

“It's important that doctors remind parents to share their child's asthma action plan with school teachers, after school carers and sport coaches so they are prepared should an asthma flare-up occur.

“Parents should also be familiar with their school's asthma policy including whether their child can carry their own reliever.”

The National Asthma Council Australia has issued the following clinical tips, which support best practice asthma care, to help doctors prepare paediatric patients for the new school year:

- When paediatric patients known to have asthma present for any reason, ask about asthma control and being ready for asthma when at school;
- Make sure each child has an up-to-date written asthma action plan and the child and/or parents understand how to follow it;
- Remind parents to get their child back into their asthma routine before the school year starts, including taking preventer medications every day, if prescribed;
- Recommend a full asthma check-up before the school year starts, or at least before activities like sports lessons start to make sure all is as well as can be; and
- Take the opportunity to check that the child and/or parents are using inhalers correctly.

Prof Jaffé said that both children and their carers must be familiar with their reliever medication and know how to use it correctly. He recommended that doctors check the latest paediatric management recommendations in the Australian Asthma Handbook available at [www.astmahandbook.org.au](http://www.astmahandbook.org.au).

Doctors can access action plan templates and demonstration videos on inhaler techniques for people with asthma at [www.nationalasthma.org.au](http://www.nationalasthma.org.au). They may also like to download the back to school factsheet for parents and carers <https://www.nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/resources/patients-carers/factsheets/back-to-school-checklist-for-kids-with-asthma-1>

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For further information, or to arrange an interview with a National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson, please contact:

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