Updated Asthma Handbook includes new evidence-based guidance for asthma best practice

The National Asthma Council today released version 1.3 of the Australian Asthma Handbook. This revision includes important and timely guidance on the identification and management of thunderstorm asthma, clinical interrelationship between asthma and allergic rhinitis, and the diagnoses and management of patients with asthma-COPD overlap.

The Australian Asthma Handbook has been developed by an interdisciplinary team of medical experts and incorporates feedback from primary care providers. The Handbook is an online resource and searchable by topics.

Professor Amanda Barnard, Chair of the National Asthma Council Australia Guidelines Committee and general practitioner said:

“It’s important for general practitioners to keep current with asthma best practice by referring to the Handbook for evidence-based guidance and practical advice.

“The timely inclusion of updated thunderstorm asthma and allergic rhinitis advice aims to prepare healthcare professionals and their practices for the grass pollen season. The asthma-COPD overlap information responds to a growing recognition of asthma-COPD overlap as a clinical entity and an emerging body of evidence around its prevalence, diagnosis and treatment. “

Highlights of the Australian Asthma Handbook version 1.3 include:

- **Update of advice on the prevention and management of thunderstorm asthma for different risk groups**

  Management for people with asthma who are at risk of thunderstorm-triggered asthma should include:
  
  - regular inhaled corticosteroids for continuous use if indicated (most adults and older adolescents with asthma)
  - for patients for whom preventer therapy is not otherwise indicated, regular inhaled corticosteroids for at least 2 weeks before and throughout the pollen season (e.g. in Victoria, ideally 1 September–31 December)
  - training in correct inhaler technique, and check technique and adherence regularly
  - advice to carry a reliever inhaler and replace it before the expiry date
o an up-to-date written asthma action plan that includes thunderstorm advice and instructs
the person to increase doses of both inhaled preventer and reliever (as well as starting oral
corticosteroids, if indicated) in response to flare-ups.

In addition, people with seasonal allergic rhinitis who do not use intranasal corticosteroid
treatment all year are advised to use intranasal corticosteroid starting 6 weeks before the pollen
season (or exposure) and continuing until pollen levels abate (e.g. in Victoria, ideally 1 September–
31 December).

Notes:
Most adults and older adolescents with asthma should be using a regular inhaled corticosteroid
long term. People with asthma are particularly at risk of thunderstorm-triggered asthma if they
have seasonal (springtime) allergic rhinitis (i.e. allergic to ryegrass pollen), and live in or are
travelling to an area with high grass pollen levels. People with allergy to ryegrass pollen without
known asthma are also at risk of thunderstorm-triggered asthma.

- **Update of advice on managing allergic rhinitis in people with asthma**, including to recommend the
  combination of an intranasal corticosteroid (INCS) and intranasal antihistamine for patients whose
  symptoms are severe or not controlled by INCS alone.

- **Interim advice for treatment for asthma-COPD overlap**, emphasising that patients with asthma-
  COPD overlap should be identified and treated differently from people with COPD or asthma alone
  because they have more symptoms, more flare-ups, greater use of health services, and higher
  mortality than patients with either condition alone.

The updated *Australian Asthma Handbook version 1.3*, including a full list of amendments, is available at:
[www.asthmahandbook.org.au](http://www.asthmahandbook.org.au). The corresponding Quick Reference Guide v1.3 is also downloadable as a PDF
from the website. Please note that printed copies of this Guide will not be published.

The National Asthma Council’s recently published standalone information papers on thunderstorm asthma,
managing allergic rhinitis in people with asthma, and asthma-COPD overlap are available at
[www.nationalasthma.org.au](http://www.nationalasthma.org.au)

The National Asthma Council Australia maintained strict editorial independence in developing these
resources. The Handbook’s revision was partially supported by unrestricted educational grants from
sponsors Boehringer Ingelheim and Novartis.

--- ENDS ---

For further information, or to arrange an interview with a National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson,
please contact:
December 5, 2017

Lelde McCoy, The Reputation Group
Mob: 0417362768
lm@thereputationgroup.com.au