

Preparing for school with allergies and asthma

Going back to school is a fun and exciting time for children and parents. However, it is also an important time to remember that children with allergies and asthma face challenges in the classroom. These challenges can range from discomfort that makes it hard to concentrate on school work, to symptoms that reduce a child's ability to participate in recess or physical education class, to life-threatening reactions from food allergies or insect stings.

It is reported that more than 9 million children under the age of 18 suffer from allergies and asthma. This can account for more than 14 million missed school days, millions of dollars in medical bills and even lost work days for parents. Therefore, it is important for children and their families to prepare for back-to-school season by learning about ways to prevent allergies and asthma from interfering with school.

The most common allergens at school that may cause an allergic or asthmatic reaction include:

- Dust mites
- Chalk dust
- Animal dander from class pets or pet hair on a student's clothing
- Pollen and molds
- Exercise
- Insect stings at recess

If your child has food sensitivities, remind them not to share food with their friends. Six foods account for 90% of food allergy in children:

- Milk
- Egg
- Peanuts
- Wheat
- Soy
- Tree nuts

Tips to remember for the school year

Given the amount of time children are away from home during the school year, it is important that children and their families work together with teachers, coaches and school nurses to avoid asthma and allergy triggers, and to deal with symptoms. You can help relieve some potential allergens that may be affecting your child's allergies or asthma during school:

- Before school starts, tour the school to identify potential allergy/asthma triggers.
- Schedule a meeting with teachers and the school



nurse to discuss your child's allergic condition.

- Encourage your child to take his or her medications as prescribed.
- Remind your child about his/her allergy and asthma triggers. Encourage children to ask teachers for help when symptoms worsen.
- If your child is allergic to certain foods, ask school cafeteria staff and teachers to avoid those and suggest safe alternatives.
- Have your food-sensitive child bring a bag lunch to school each day.
- Make sure auto-injectable epinephrine is with your child for emergency situations, and that teachers and the school nurse know how to use it properly.
- Inform physical education teachers and coaches about asthma and warning signs of an exacerbation which could trigger exercise-induced asthma.

Although many children suffer from food allergies, asthma and allergic rhinitis, if appropriate measures are taken, they may not be endangered or slowed down by these diseases. It is important to have good communication with school personnel about your child's condition, but it is also important for your child to see an allergist/immunologist for an evaluation before the school year begins.

Seeing an allergist/immunologist for your allergies and asthma can greatly improve your quality of life. To find an allergist/immunologist in your area, visit www.aaaai.org/physref.

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