

Preparing Your Patients and Their Families for School
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Quite often in the business of our days, we forget a key responsibility to our patients. After we have gone over points covered in the guidelines, asthma triggers, medications, delivery devices and asthma control, it is no wonder that we do not remember to address a young patient's readiness to manage his or her disease, whether your patient is spending the day at kindergarten for the first time or leaving home to go to college. In order to bridge this all too common gap in patient education, the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago has designed two easy to read sheets which medical providers can provide as resources for their patients.

Asthma is the #1 cause of school absenteeism among children accounting for more than 14 million total missed days of school.¹ At the start of every school year, it seems that the news media reports an increase in the number of asthma emergencies. Nearly half (44%) of all asthma hospitalizations are for children.² Yet, when you do an internet search for "Asthma and School" you will find a lot of information on how to tell if the school is "asthma friendly" or prepared, but there is little information available on how you as a health care provider can prepare your patient for the responsibility that comes from caring for his or her health while away from home.

Asthma control is an ongoing process, and patients need to be as prepared for school as for every other aspect of their care and activities. Medical providers need to work with patients and caregivers prior to the child entering kindergarten. Most states, with the exceptions of Connecticut, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Vermont, allow students to carry and administer their medication provided they obtain written approval from their health care providers.³ In order to achieve the level of competence necessary for a five-year old child to self-medicate, it takes much education by both the caregiver and the provider. The *What You Need to Know Preparing for School with Asthma* sheet helps you guide caregivers and patients through this process.

When a patient will be spending time away from the watchful eyes of caregivers or health care providers, it is imperative that he or she is properly prepared to maintain control of the asthma. This is not more evident than when a patient is preparing to leave home for college. This is a time when your patient will be challenged with a new environment, away from their primary medical care and responsible to make his or her own medical decisions. Often the patient is faced with the pressures of peers, new social environments, and challenging academics. Keeping his or her health is not always a priority particularly when you account for the feelings of invincibility that often accompanies adolescence, and learning to advocate for oneself is not something that comes easy to an 18 or 19 year old. Often children with chronic illness leave college due to

¹ "Condition of Education," NCES, U.S. Department of Education 2001

² "National Hospital Discharge Survey," NCHS, U.S. CDC, 2000

³ http://breatherville.com/cityhall/ch_childrights.htm

health concerns that affect their academic performance. Universities are not always accommodating to their needs, and the systems in place to assist them can be complex to maneuver. The *What You Need to Know Preparing for College* sheet, helps guide these health novices through the complicated systems, offers suggestions for getting help, and provides steps to complete before leaving home to ensure their health and their rights are protected.

Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago has identified and addressed two areas of need for patient education. Our patient's health is our first priority, and that includes providing him or her with the tools to live an active and fulfilling life with asthma. To learn more about the *Need To Know* educational series go to www.lungchicago.org.

Preparing Your Patients and Families for School:

http://www.lungchicago.org/site/files/487/54229/212501/284564/Preparing_for_School_with_Asthma.pdf

Preparing for College:

http://www.lungchicago.org/site/files/487/54229/212501/284562/Preparing_for_College.pdf