

Asthma Attacks Peak in the Fall

Health Officials say child hospitalizations for Asthma are highest in September

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) sent out a news release noting that during the fall, especially September, the number of child hospitalizations due to asthma peaks in Minnesota. This pattern has been consistent since 1998, the earliest year for which MDH had data on asthma hospitalization rates.

As Minnesotans prepare to send their children back to school, they should also prepare for a possible peak in asthma attacks, said officials from the Minnesota Department of Health today. The fall, especially September, brings the greatest number of child hospitalizations due to asthma. This pattern has been consistent since 1998, the earliest year for which MDH had data on asthma hospitalization rates. Other states, including Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Nebraska, have reported similar patterns.

The most distinct peaks in September are seen in children, with pre-school children having the highest rates of asthma hospitalizations. School-age children, including young teenagers, have the second highest rates in September, while older age groups exhibit less seasonal variation. Though there is no single, proven reason for this peak, it is believed to be influenced by respiratory infections and increased pollen and outdoor mold counts. "Parents of children with asthma can do many things to prevent hospitalizations," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dianne Mandernach. "As they're taking care of the usual back-to-school tasks, parents should also schedule a "well-asthma" visit with their child's health care provider to review their asthma management plan." Parents should:

- Obtain an up-to-date Asthma Action Plan (AAP) from the child's health care provider and give a copy to the school nurse and/or day care provider.
- Make sure the child has asthma rescue medications, holding chambers and peak flow meters for both home and school.
- Make sure the child has access to his/her asthma medications and knows how to use them.
- Minimize the child's exposure to things that could trigger an asthma attack, such as dust mites, secondhand smoke, mold, and pet dander.
- Schedule a flu-shot appointment with the child's health care provider when the vaccine is available.

Parents of children who experience any of the following should question if their child's asthma is under control or not and should see a health care provider:

- If the child uses a rescue inhaler more than twice a week for asthma symptoms, or
- If the child wakes up at night with asthma symptoms more than twice a month, or
- If the child uses more than two canisters of rescue medication (such as albuterol) in a year.

Health care providers can take a number of steps to help families prepare for a possible increase in asthma attacks in September. For example:

- Health care providers can write a prescription specifically for a second rescue medication and holding chamber for school.
- Pharmacists can work with the family and the child's health care provider to get the proper asthma medications and equipment for both home and school.
- School nurses can work with the family, teachers and coaches to support the child at school with an Asthma Action Plan from the child's health care provider.

The Minnesota Department of Health is communicating with doctors, schools nurses, pharmacists and other health care providers across the state to help them prepare for a potentially busy asthma season. "Working together, families and health care providers can help minimize the possibility that children will need to be hospitalized for asthma attacks this fall," Commissioner Mandernach said.

For more information, call the Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Program at 612-676-5226 or visit their Web site at: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/index.html for fact sheets, educational materials, blank Asthma Action Plans, and local resources.

Information is also available on the Minnesota Asthma Coalition Web Site www.mnasthma.org, the National Heart Lung Blood Institute (NHLBI) at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/index.htm, and the American Lung Association of Minnesota at www.alamn.org/asthma

Data source: Minnesota Hospital Association