As Head Start and Early Head Start staff, you may care for children with asthma. The practices you have been following to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases will help keep all children safe, but you may have some questions about how to support children with asthma during the pandemic. Use these tips to help children with asthma participate safely in program activities.

**Follow COVID-19 protocols.**
Wearing masks, washing hands, cleaning surfaces, and providing well-ventilated spaces with good air quality create healthy environments for everyone. Asthma symptoms may be triggered by colds and other illnesses, such as COVID-19. Reducing germs promotes good health for children with asthma. In addition, masks help filter allergens from the air that may trigger asthma.

**Eliminate asthma triggers.**
Cleaning products can trigger an asthma attack. Safety protocols during the pandemic include more frequent routine cleaning, especially high-touch surfaces. Choose products for cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting that are fragrance-free and don’t contain chemicals that may irritate children’s airways. Prepare and use cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting products according to product labels. While using cleaning products, keep children away and ensure good ventilation.

National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety
Promote healthy indoor air, and increase time outside when air quality is safe.

Good air quality supports the health of children with asthma. Programs can work with a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) expert to reduce the number of virus particles indoors by increasing ventilation, or the amount of fresh air brought indoors. Ensuring the HVAC system is in good working order, maximizing fresh air, and cleaning filters help improve indoor air quality. Some programs may also choose open windows and doors to bring in more fresh air. Consider the use of portable air filtering devices to clean the air in classrooms or family child care homes. Simple machines with a HEPA filter are the gold standard when used according to manufacturer’s instructions.

Spending time outside reduces the risk of exposure to COVID-19 but may trigger an asthma flare-up due to allergens, such as pollution or pollen. Check the air quality index daily and avoid going outdoors on high-risk days. Make sure rescue inhalers are accessible during outdoor time.

Develop and maintain up-to-date asthma action plans.

Asthma is different for each child, so it’s important to know each child’s triggers, symptoms, and treatment plan. Ensure that all staff members and substitutes who interact with a child with asthma understand the child’s plan. It is critical they all know what symptoms to look for and how to manage them, including how to administer medications. Check the expiration dates of medications and orders regularly.

Asthma treatments using inhalers with spacers (with face mask for young children) are preferred over nebulizer treatments. Studies show that rescue inhalers and spacers are just as effective as nebulizers in treating asthma symptoms in young children. You may need to work with families and health care providers to update asthma action plans and to ensure the child and staff are comfortable using the inhaler and spacer to manage any symptoms.

Children with disabilities may have increased asthma risks, so it is important to monitor their plans and work closely with families and service providers to promptly address concerns and update children’s individualization plans when needed.

Communicate regularly with children’s families and health care providers.

Communication with families and health care providers may be more difficult because of COVID-19, but it is just as important as before. Help families find health care providers, if needed, and help them ask medical questions. Studies show that remote health care visits increase asthma follow-up care and improve asthma outcomes. Together with families, you can support ongoing health care visits and their efforts to manage their child’s asthma effectively whether at the program or at home.

Conclusion

Head Start programs have effective strategies to help children with asthma avoid unnecessary exposure to germs and other triggers that can make them sick. By implementing health policies and procedures, COVID-19 protocols, and up-to-date asthma action plans, you can help children with asthma continue to learn and thrive in all Head Start settings.