



Family Education Sheet



Asthma Triggers

What is an asthma trigger?

- Many things may cause asthma symptoms to start. These are called triggers.
- Everyone's asthma triggers are different.
- It is important to try to control your child's exposure to things that make his or her asthma worse.
- Sometimes it is difficult to know exactly what your child's triggers are. You should work closely with your child's doctor or nurse to identify your child's specific triggers.
- There are 2 types of triggers that may make your child's asthma worse: irritants and allergies.

What is an irritant?

- Irritants are substances that irritate the nose, throat or airways.
- Common irritants include:
 - Cigarette Smoke-It is important that no one smokes in the home or car with a child who has asthma.
 - Strong Smells-Avoid aerosol sprays, perfumes, and strong smelling cleaning solutions in your home. Try to clean when your child is not home.
 - Colds-Teach your child to wash his or her hands often. Many children with asthma should get the flu shot every year. Check with your child's doctor to see if this is right for your child.

How do allergies affect my child's asthma?

- Many children with asthma have allergies. Allergies can make asthma worse.
- In children with allergies, the immune system becomes sensitive to things called allergens.
- Exposure to these allergens increases inflammation (swelling) in the airways, and can cause asthma symptoms.
- Ongoing inflammation of the airways causes the airways to be more sensitive to triggers.
- If you suspect that your child has allergies, you should talk to your child's doctor or nurse about a referral to see an allergy specialist. A specialist can tell you exactly what your child is allergic to so that you can know what things your child should avoid.

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- Some common allergies include:
 - Pets - Keep furry or feathered animals out of the home, and especially out of the bedroom.
 - Pests (mice, cockroaches) - Keep kitchen clean and all food in closed containers. A professional exterminator is the best way to control household pests.
 - Dust mites -Wash bedding in hot water. Remove stuffed animals and toys from your child's bed. Try to dust and vacuum once a week while the allergic child is not in the room. It may be helpful to cover mattress and pillows with mite-proof covers. Mold - Mold growth can be found on bathroom tiles, in basements and outdoors in soil, leaves, and compost piles. Diluted household bleach or Lysol® can be used for cleaning to prevent mold build-up. Using a dehumidifier regularly will help prevent mold growth in your home. Avoid plants, aquariums and humidifiers in your child's room.
 - Pollen - Keep windows and doors closed during high pollen seasons and use air conditioning with a filter that can be cleaned often. Shower and wash hair after being outside for a long time.

A [Spanish](#) version of this is available from your provider

Send comments or questions to: Familyed@childrens.harvard.edu
