

Paediatric Asthma Emergencies Surge in February - Are Your Patients Back-to-School Ready?

Ahead of the start of the 2017 school year, the National Asthma Council Australia is asking doctors to ensure that their paediatric asthma patients are ready for a safe return to the classroom.

The 'February Epidemic', a big asthma spike in children immediately after school goes back, is a well-recognised and documented phenomenon.

Studies in Australia and the UK have shown asthma hospitalisations surge during the first month of the school year, with cases in Australia rising as much as threefold in children aged five to 14 years and doubling in pre-schoolers. While increased risks have also been recorded at the start of subsequent school terms, the February spike is by far the most significant.

National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson, Professor Adam Jaffé, respiratory paediatrician, said that in school settings factors such as sharing a new set of bugs which can trigger colds and respiratory infections, less strict asthma management over the holidays and a change of environment or allergens can trigger asthma in children and teenagers.

"The impact of asthma flare ups in the first few weeks of the first school term can be reduced if children and their parents and carers are properly prepared.

He urged doctors to check their paediatric patients' asthma, including reviewing their device technique and ensuring their asthma action plan is up to date.

"It's important that doctors remind parents to share their child's asthma action plan with school teachers, after school carers and sport coaches so they can be prepared should an asthma flare-up occur. "

The National Asthma Council Australia has issued the following clinical tips, which support best practice asthma care, to help doctors prepare paediatric patients for the new school year:

- When paediatric patients known to have asthma present for any reason, ask about asthma control and being ready for asthma when at school;
- Make sure each child has an up-to-date written asthma action plan and the child and/or parents understand how to follow it;
- Remind parents to get their child back into their asthma routine before the school year starts, including taking preventer medications every day, if prescribed;

- Recommend a full asthma check-up before the school year starts, or at least before activities like sports lessons start to make sure all is as well as can be; and
- Take the opportunity to check that the child and/or parents are using inhalers correctly.

Prof Jaffé said that both children and their carers must be familiar with their reliever medication and know how to use it correctly. He recommended that doctors check the latest paediatric management recommendations in the Australian Asthma Handbook available at www.astmahandbook.org.au.

Doctors can access action plan templates and demonstration videos on inhaler techniques for people with asthma at www.nationalasthma.org.au. They may also like to download the back to school checklist for parents and carers prepared by Asthma Australia available at <https://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au/news/national/back-to-school-asthma>.

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For further information, or to arrange an interview with a National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson, please contact:

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