

Asthma and Schools

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that intermittently inflames, narrows, and fills the airways of the lungs with mucus, making it difficult to breathe. Symptoms may include wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, or nighttime or early morning coughing. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can happen rarely or every day. Asthma is one of the most common long-term diseases of children, and adolescents, but can also impact adults.

Indoor allergens and irritants play a significant role in triggering asthma episodes. Effectively managing asthma requires a combination of medical management of the disease and avoidance or mitigation of environmental triggers. It is important for schools to reduce environmental irritants because students spend a majority of their time in school buildings. Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism. Approximately one in two children with asthma miss at least one day of instructional learning, each year, due to asthma. Nationally, in 2018, 2.2 million children aged 5-17 years missed more than 7.9 million school days.¹

Common Asthma Triggers Found in Schools

Environmental Asthma Trigger Found in Schools	Asthma Management Tip for Schools
Tobacco Smoke	Adopt and enforce comprehensive tobacco-free schools policies including school grounds and events including second and third hand smoke.
Cockroaches and Pests	Use Integrated Pest Management
Mold	Fix leaks and moisture problems Dry wet areas within 24-48 hours to prevent mold. Clean hard, moldy surfaces with water and detergent and dry. Replace surfaces that cannot be properly cleaned.
Dust Mites	Dust and vacuum thoroughly and regularly. Keep classrooms free of clutter Wash stuffed toys

¹ <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease/asthma-trends-brief/trends-and-burden?msclkid=96999d31c0dc11ec9e0944619522170c>

Animal Dander	Remove animals from classrooms Keep animals away from sensitive students and ventilation
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Other asthma triggers that can be found in schools include cleaning products, pesticides, and school bus exhaust. More information about controlling these environmental triggers can be found in other sections of this manual.

Resources:

- CDC Asthma: <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/default.htm>
- CDC School and Childcare Providers: <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/schools.html>
- EPA Managing Asthma in the School Environment: <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/managing-asthma-school-environment>
- EPA Framework for Effective School Indoor Air Quality Management: [Framework for Effective School IAQ Management | Creating Healthy Indoor Air Quality in Schools | US EPA](#)
- ALA Asthma-Friendly Schools Initiative Toolkit: <https://www.lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/asthma/asthma-education-advocacy/asthma-friendly-schools-initiative/toolkit/>