

PEDIATRIC ASTHMA TOOLKIT

A guide to understanding, managing, and helping your child live well with asthma



Created in partnership with the INHALE Patient Advisory Board



What is INHALE?

At Inspiring Health Advances in Lung Care (INHALE), we work with healthcare providers across Michigan to help people like you breathe easier. Whether you or your child have asthma or you're living with COPD, we're here to support you. Asthma affects about 12% of Michigan residents, so you're not alone.

To find more helpful tips and resources visit inhalecqi.org.

The INHALE Patient Advisory Board, a group of patients with asthma and COPD, created this toolkit to support families whose child may have asthma. We hope it helps you learn about asthma and feel more confident managing it.



UNDERSTANDING ASTHMA

Asthma is a long-term (chronic) condition that makes it hard for air to move in and out of the lungs. Triggers (like allergens, smoke, or weather) cause the airways to:

- Swell (inflammation)
- Fill with mucus
- Tighten (bronchoconstriction)

Learn more:

- [What is asthma?](#)
- [Signs and symptoms](#)
- [Asthma by age group](#)

Recognizing Symptoms

Common symptoms include:

- Coughing (with or without a cold, after exercise, at night)
- Tightness or heaviness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing (a whistling or hissing sound)

Who Can Have Asthma?

Asthma affects people of all ages and backgrounds.

- [Asthma in children](#)
- [Asthma in the Black community](#)
- [Asthma in women](#)





DIAGNOSIS & DOCTOR VISITS



Make sure to talk to your child’s healthcare provider to learn more about how to manage and treat your child’s asthma.

How can I prepare for my child’s doctor appointments?

- Write down your symptoms, medications, and questions.
- Bring your inhalers or medication list.
- Use our [Patient Checklist](#).

What doctors can help treat my child’s asthma?

Pediatrician: Your child’s pediatrician can help manage their asthma. They can prescribe medicines, make an [asthma action plan](#), and guide you on what to do if symptoms get worse. If your child’s asthma is not getting better with the plan, the pediatrician may refer you to a specialist.

Pediatric Pulmonologist or Pulmonologist: These are lung specialists who work with children who have asthma that is hard to control. They may do tests like breathing tests ([spirometry](#) or pulmonary function tests) and blood tests to learn more about your child’s asthma and decide on the best treatment.

Allergist: An allergist treats asthma that may be related to allergies. They can test your child for allergies and help find triggers that may be making asthma worse.

Otolaryngologist (ENT — Ear, Nose, and Throat doctor): An ENT can help if your child has sinus problems, frequent ear infections, or breathing issues caused by the nose or throat. These issues can sometimes make asthma harder to manage.



How do I know if my child's asthma is not under control?



ASTHMA MEDICATIONS

Finding the right asthma medicine can take time. Below are a few of the options your child's doctor might discuss with you:

- **Long-term controller** – it has to be taken every day to work right. It keeps the lungs open, reduces swelling, and asthma flares.
- **Quick Reliever/Rescue** – used when breathing gets bad so air can get in and out of the lungs. If your child needs to take this medicine a lot, their asthma is not in control.
- **SMART Therapy** – a way to treat asthma using one inhaler containing an inhaled steroid (inhaled corticosteroid) and a long-acting reliever (long-acting beta-agonist) for both daily doses (maintenance) and reliever (rescue) doses.
- **Steroids** – Steroid pills or syrups take away swelling very fast in the breathing tubes when your child's breathing gets really bad. They work very fast to help breathing return to normal. They should not be taken regularly unless your child's doctor tells you to do so.

Type	Example	What They Do
Long-Term Controller	Flovent, Singulair	Taken daily to reduce swelling and prevent flare-ups
Quick Reliever (Rescue)	Albuterol	Used when breathing suddenly worsens
SMART Therapy	Inhaled steroid + long-acting reliever	one inhaler for daily use <i>and</i> rescue doses
Oral Steroids	Prednisone, Dexamethasone	Quickly reduce airway swelling during severe attacks





ASTHMA CONTROL

Taking care of your child’s asthma helps them breathe easier and feel better every day. Using their inhaler the right way and taking their medicine as prescribed keep their little lungs healthy and prevent flare-ups. Good control also means they may need oral steroids (OCS) less often, which is better for their body. Small daily steps can make a big difference in your child’s asthma.

Tools for Understanding Control



Taking oral corticosteroids (OCS) too often can be bad for children with asthma. While they can help when your child’s asthma gets really bad, using them a lot can cause problems like weight gain, mood changes, or weak bones. It’s best to keep their asthma well-controlled so they don’t need OCS as often. [Learn more here.](#)



Inhaler Education Toolkit

[The Inhaler Education Toolkit](#) was created to help you and your child learn how to use their inhaler the right way. It includes easy-to-follow tips, videos, and tools to make sure their medicine works as well as it should—helping them breathe easier and stay in control of their asthma.



Check out the [INHALE CQI YouTube channel](#) for short videos that show how to use different inhalers the right way. Watching these step-by-step guides can help you and your child feel more confident and make sure they’re getting the most from your medicine.



[This tool](#) explains why spacers (valved holding chambers) are important to use with your device. It also explains how to get a prescription for a spacer.

[Explore More Tools](#)



MANAGING ASTHMA

Managing asthma with an action plan helps you recognize early symptoms, take the right steps, and stay in control of your child's breathing every day.

A **SMART Asthma Action Plan** helps you use one inhaler for both daily control and quick relief. This approach makes it easier to manage symptoms, prevent flare-ups, and reduce the need for oral steroids or emergency visits.

6-17 years old

Download

This **Asthma Action Plan** from the American Lung Association is for use at home and school. Please note: it cannot be used with SMART therapy.

Download



MANAGING ASTHMA AT SCHOOL

Children with asthma need support both at home and at school. Schools have rules and laws that help keep students with asthma safe, make sure they can get their medicines, and ensure staff know what to do in an emergency. Learning about these protections can help you work with the school to create a safe and healthy plan for your child. Click the links below to find out more about how asthma can be managed in school and what rights your child has.

[School Health Care Plans for Asthma and Allergies](#)

[School - Asthma Policies and Law](#)

[Sports, Other Activities, and Asthma](#)





ASTHMA TRIGGERS

Triggers are things that make your child's asthma worse. They can be things in the air that they are allergic to (aeroallergens); things that bother their lungs when they breathe in small bits of things like tobacco smoke or chemicals (irritants); or viruses and bacteria.

Most kids have many different triggers and they each may affect them in different ways. It is important to figure out what triggers your child's asthma.

Different environment, different triggers

Keep in mind that different environments have different allergens:

- **Schools and other enclosed spaces** attract a lot of dust, mites, pests, and mold
- **Workplaces** can have hundreds of triggers we're normally not exposed to
- **Outdoors**, pollen, air pollution, and every day weather can set off asthma.

Additional Information

- Potential Asthma Triggers
- Allergens
- Outdoor Air Pollution
- Indoor Air Quality
- Weather
- Secondhand Smoke and Vaping
 - Learn more about vaping
- Peak Week - September

The National Health, Lung, and Blood Institute has put together an [infographic for managing asthma everyday.](#)



MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH WITH ASTHMA

HEALTHY LIVING

Staying healthy with asthma is important because good control helps prevent flare-ups, reduces missed school days, and keeps kids breathing easier so they can enjoy everyday activities. This video teaches kids and families the basics of asthma—how to spot symptoms, when to get help, and how to use an inhaler correctly. It also shows how kids can stay active and confident at home, in school, and during play.

[LEARN MORE](#)



DIET

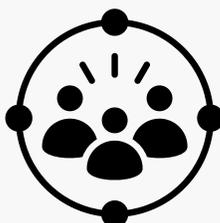
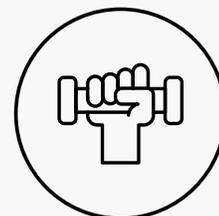
Managing your child's diet can play a helpful role in controlling their asthma. Eating nutritious, anti-inflammatory foods supports lung health, helps reduce asthma triggers like reflux, and keeps their immune system strong. While food won't replace their medications, making healthy choices can make breathing easier and help prevent flare-ups.

[LEARN MORE](#)

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Don't let asthma keep your child from having fun with sports or other activities. Exercise is good for everyone, including people with asthma! There are ways to manage asthma that is triggered by exercise, and having your child's asthma under control will keep them breathing easy while they play their best.

[LEARN MORE](#)



FINDING COMMUNITY

Connecting with a community can make managing your child's asthma easier. Sharing experiences, tips, and support with others who understand what you're going through can reduce stress, boost confidence, and help you feel less alone as you navigate your child's asthma journey.

[LEARN MORE](#)

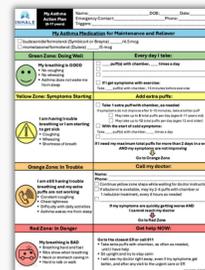


ASTHMA FLARES

Asthma flares (attacks) come along with warning signs that may be mild or serious. Review the list below and develop an asthma action plan with your child’s doctor to show to your child’s school, daycare and family. Click on the links below to learn more.

RED ZONE signs on asthma action plans:

- Breathing hard and fast
- Ribs show when breathing
- Neck or stomach caving in
- Hard to talk or walk



If your child is in the **Red Zone**—get help **NOW**—go to the closest Emergency Room or call **911**

- Give extra puffs of their reliever (rescue) inhaler with their chamber, as often as needed, until help arrives or you get to the hospital
- Sit them upright and try to keep them calm
- See your child’s doctor right away, even after they are better, after any visit to urgent care or the ER

When should I take my child to urgent care / Emergency Room?

How does a peak flow meter help manage asthma flares?

How can Medicaid/Children’s Special Health Care Services can help with Asthma Control?

Peak Flow Meter





MEDICATION ASSISTANCE

If you're having trouble affording your child's asthma medications, you're not alone. Many parents of asthma patients benefit from savings programs, generics, insurance options, or community resources that can help lower costs. Talk with your child's healthcare team so you don't have to skip doses or go without the medicines that keep your child breathing well.

What should I do if I can't afford my child's medicine or devices?

Click on the links below to learn more:

- [Affording inhalers](#)
- [What do I do if my medication isn't available but I need it right away?](#)
- [Tips for Getting Asthma Devices](#)

Help with other health concerns and transportation to appointments:

- [Michigan 211](#)





DEFINITIONS

- **Action Plan** – a plan you create with your doctor for what makes your asthma worse and what to do when it gets hard to breathe.
- **Air Quality/Pollution** – particles and pollution in the air that make it hard to breathe.
- **Allergist** – a doctor that treats allergy and asthma.
- **Anti Inflammatory Reliever (AIR) Therapy** – a way to manage asthma that gives you a medicine that stops the inflammation (swelling) and bronchoconstriction (squeezing) either in two different inhalers or in one.
- **Asthma** – Asthma is a lung condition that inflames the lungs and makes it hard to breathe.
- **Asthma flare/attack/exacerbation**– when asthma symptoms like cough, wheezing, shortness of breath get worse. The asthma action plan will tell you what to look for and what to do.
- **Device** – a tool like an inhaler that will be used to deliver the medicine you will take.
- **Eosinophil** – a white blood cell in our body that is a part of our immune system. They help fight infections and allergens.
- **Inhaler** – a device that sends medicine into the lungs.
- **Long-term controller** – Long-term Controller medicines must be taken every day to work right. They keep your breathing tubes from swelling and get rid of asthma symptoms. Using them regularly as prescribed will decrease your risk of having another asthma flare-up. You should always brush your teeth and rinse your mouth out after using the medicine. Some common Long-term Controller Medicines are: Fluticasone (Flovent), Budesonide (Pulmicort), Fluticasone propionate and salmeterol (Advair), Montelukast (Singulair).
- **Otolaryngologist or ear, nose, and throat doctor**– a doctor that treats the ears, nose, and throat.
- **Peak Flow Meter** – A peak flow meter helps you check how well your asthma is doing.
- **Primary Care Doctor** – this doctor is the doctor you see regularly for visits such as your yearly physical and the doctor you call when you have any concerns about your health.
- **Pulmonologist** – a doctor that treats the lungs.
- **Quick Reliever/Rescue** – used when breathing gets bad so air can get in and out of the lungs. If you need to take this medicine a lot, your asthma is not in control. Common quick reliever medications are: Albuterol, levabuterol, pirbuterol.
- **Single Maintenance Reliever Therapy (SMART)** – a way to treat asthma using one inhaler containing an inhaled steroid (inhaled corticosteroid) and a long-acting reliever (long-acting beta-agonist) for both daily doses (maintenance) and reliever (rescue) doses.
- **Steroids (also known as oral corticosteroids)** – medicines like prednisolone or dexamethasone that work very fast to make breathing normal. They should not be taken all the time, only when breathing gets really bad. Common oral corticosteroids are: prednisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone.
- **Triggers** – each person will have different things that make their asthma worse. It could be food, smoke, allergies, animals, or other triggers like a common cold. It is important you know what your triggers are and ways to control them.



THANK YOU

We hope this toolkit gives you the knowledge and confidence to better understand and manage your child's asthma. Remember, you're not alone—your child's healthcare team, school staff, and community are here to support your family. With the right tools, a clear plan, and ongoing communication with your providers, you can help your child stay in control of their asthma and breathe easier every day.

