

MANAGING ASTHMA IN NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

IV. THE STUDENT WITH ASTHMA

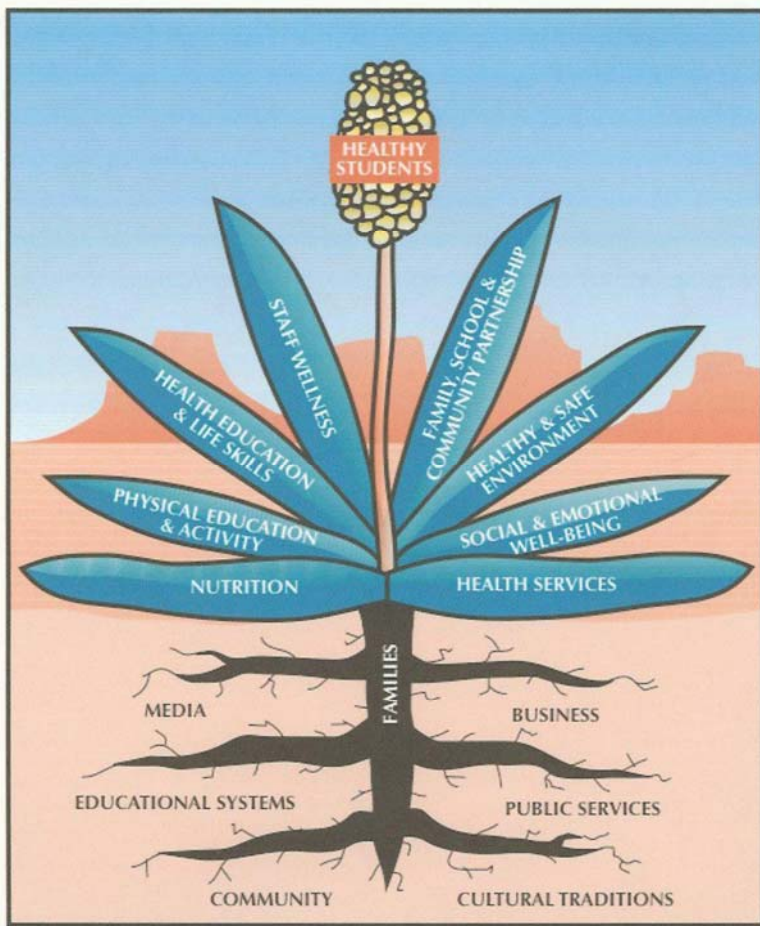


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Student Needs and Responsibilities

Important Points

Students with asthma are first of all students.

Good asthma management strategies will help ensure that students with asthma are viewed the same as other students.

Students with asthma and their families should keep the school well informed.

Students with asthma need to participate in school activities to the fullest extent possible.

Students with asthma and their school community share a joint responsibility for good asthma management.

A student with asthma is first of all a student. He or she should not be viewed as an "asthmatic," but rather as a student who must cope with asthma along with all the other challenges of learning in the school setting. Students with asthma and allergies should be encouraged to participate fully in all school activities and should be viewed the same as other classmates. A number of well-known athletes such as Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Jerome Bettis, and Chris Freeman provide excellent examples of effective asthma management skills and professional success.

Coping with asthma requires that the student and staff be knowledgeable about this chronic disease. Specifically, each student must know what "triggers" an asthma episode and, most importantly, be able to recognize symptoms of an onset. The ability to do this will clearly vary with the student's age and ability and in some cases assistance may be required. In general, all students should be encouraged to manage their own asthma and assume responsibility for their own well-being.

At the beginning of each school year, certain steps should be taken to insure success. The student and his/her family should provide the information needed to manage asthma in the school setting. This will include the following:

- his/her asthma triggers (see list of potential triggers)
- symptoms of an onset
- treatment measures employed, including medications/inhalers
- situations where assistance may be needed

Providing this information at the start of the school year will promote good asthma management and help prevent situations that might lead to problems.

While the school has a responsibility to assist the student with asthma by providing a safe, healthy, and helpful environment, the student also has responsibilities. It is important for the student to:

- avoid potential triggers
- report onset of symptoms
- use medications as prescribed
- carry and self-administer medications when capability has been demonstrated
- actively participate in activities including physical education
- refrain from using asthma as an excuse of convenience.

This mutual sharing of responsibility will go a long way to insuring successful asthma management in the school setting.

While there is no known cure for asthma, there are ways to control it. People with asthma can lead normal, productive lives with effective asthma management. Management requires a consistent, comprehensive approach and the cooperation of everyone involved. In

the school setting this means the involvement of the student with asthma, the family, the medical provider, and the ENTIRE school staff. Providing an asthma friendly school environment is essential for the control and management of asthma. All members of the school community share responsibility in this effort.

What Every Staff Member Needs To Know

Every staff member needs to be sensitive to the needs of students with asthma. Helping these students is everyone's responsibility, not just the responsibility of the school nurse. Because an asthma episode can occur potentially anywhere - in the classroom, cafeteria, gymnasium, on the playground or sports field, on a school bus, or during a field trip - every staff member should be prepared.

While every student with asthma has individual "triggers," common ones that everyone should be prepared to recognize include:

- changes in temperature, especially cold or windy weather
- cleaning products and chemicals
- cockroach and rodent droppings
- dust and dust mites
- exercise
- furry and feathered pets and their dander
- mold
- perfumes and sprays
- scented candles and incense
- stress and strong emotions
- smoke
- strong odors.

Staff members must be able to recognize the early signs and symptoms of an asthma episode in order to seek immediate help for the student. Early warning signs to watch for are:

- any difficulty in breathing
- coughing or wheezing, especially after physical activity
- complaints of tightness in the chest
- pale color, anxiety, and restlessness.

Being prepared to assist a student experiencing an asthma episode or "attack" can potentially be life saving. It is important to:

- remain with the student until help arrives and stay calm
- help the student into a position of comfort for him/her that promotes breathing- usually sitting up rather than lying down
- assist the student to take any medications or inhalers he or she has with them
- provide reassurance and decrease any stress promoting situation.

Asthma awareness and knowledge is the responsibility of every staff member. It will help ensure an asthma friendly school and a safe, healthy environment for every member of the school community.

Potential Asthma Triggers

Allergic Triggers

- animal dander from feathers and fur (includes warm-blooded animals like dogs, cats, birds, and small rodents)
- droppings from cockroaches and rodents and dried remains
- dust mites
- foods
- mold
- pollen

Environmental Triggers

- chalk dust
- cigarette smoke, second hand smoke, and smoke residue carried on clothing
- cleaning products and chemicals
- cold air
- exhaust fumes, especially diesel
- lime or other substances used to line playing fields
- markers
- new carpet outgassing
- paints
- perfumes and sprays
- pesticides
- recently mowed grass
- roofing fumes
- scented candles and incense
- smoke
- strong odor
- wind

Physical Triggers

- colds and the flu
- respiratory infections
- strong emotions (excitement, laughter, crying, stress)
- vigorous exercise
- gastro esophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- vocal cord dysfunction

Emergency Care Algorithm

ASTHMA/WHEEZING OR DIFFICULTY BREATHING

