

MANAGING ASTHMA IN NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS

V. THE ASTHMA FRIENDLY SCHOOL

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The Asthma Friendly School

Important Points

The school environment can contain irritants potentially harmful to students with asthma.

Tools are available to evaluate a school environment.

Having an asthma-friendly school is both possible and necessary.

An asthma-friendly school requires the help and cooperation of every member of the school community.

A healthy school environment is essential for successful asthma management.

An asthma friendly school requires the cooperation and commitment of every member of the school community. Surveying a school and making necessary changes can often be viewed as a challenge. However, the resulting healthy school environment is certainly worth the effort for the well-being of every member of the school community.

There are a number of recognized guidelines for determining if a school is asthma friendly. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute developed a questionnaire that is recognized as a standard in making such evaluations. Common prerequisites for an asthma friendly school include providing the following:

- a smoke free environment
- good indoor air quality
- school nurse availability – full time
- informed student self-administration of medication
- opportunities for students to participate fully in all school activities
- emergency plans to manage asthma episodes
- staff education and awareness regarding asthma.

Often the extent to which allergens and irritants are present in the school environment is not recognized. Overlooking them is very easy. Common culprits include strong odors from cleaning products, permanent markers and their erasing products, glues, and perfumes or sprays. Animal dander from furry or feathered classroom pets or that brought into the school on student and staff clothing can be irritating. Generalized dusts, plus that from carpets, chalks, mites, and poor vacuuming techniques are common problems. While aware of the problems associated with smoking and second hand smoke, many forget that residue from smoking is easily carried on clothing and brought into the school environment. Mold can be a problem even in the dry environment of New Mexico. Mold and mildew are common allergens.

Outside the classroom products used to line playing fields, insecticides, and car and bus exhaust (especially diesel) can prove troublesome. Weather conditions such as extreme cold, wind, high pollen counts, and poor air quality must be evaluated carefully. Proximity to agricultural or industrial waste also deserves consideration. At times, the list of potential asthma triggers may seem endless; however, awareness is fundamental to providing an asthma friendly school environment, both indoors and outdoors.

School construction, remodeling, and renovation require careful planning and implementation. Consideration must be given to the selection of building materials with limited “out gassing” of irritating

fumes and odors. Excellent resources outlining construction recommendations are available from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) www.epa.gov, and the Asthma Regional Council of New England (ARC) www.asthmaregionalcouncil.org. Recognizing potential environmental problems requires understanding, awareness, and caring. Interestingly, there is even a "green school" movement evolving in the United States. More information is available at www.epa.gov/iaq/greenbuilding/index.html.

An essential component of the asthma friendly school is a knowledgeable, supportive staff. Each member must be committed to promoting good indoor and outdoor air quality. Participating in staff asthma education, being involved in evaluating the school environment, and helping to establish policies and protocols are all important steps. Knowing how to make a difference for the students with asthma will be beneficial for all members of the school community.

It is important to remember that children with asthma need support to manage their asthma and to be fully active. Asthma can be controlled and students with asthma deserve an asthma friendly school environment.



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
National Asthma Education and Prevention Program
School Asthma Education Subcommittee

How Asthma-Friendly Is Your School?

Children with asthma need proper support at school to keep their asthma under control and be fully active. Use the questions below to find out how well your school assists children with asthma:

1. Is your school **free of tobacco smoke** all of the time, including during school-sponsored events?
2. Does the school maintain **good indoor air quality**? Does it **reduce or eliminate allergens and irritants** that can make asthma worse?
Allergens and irritants include pets with fur or feathers, mold, dust mites (for example, in carpets and upholstery), cockroaches, and strong odors or fumes from such products as pesticides, paint, perfumes, and cleaning chemicals.
3. Is there a **school nurse** in your school all day, every day? If not, is a nurse regularly available to the school to help write plans and give guidance for students with asthma about medicines, physical education, and field trips?
4. Can children take **medicines** at school as recommended by their doctor and parents? May children carry their own asthma medicines?
5. Does your school have an **emergency plan** for taking care of a child with a severe asthma episode (attack)? Is it made clear what to do? Who to call? When to call?
6. Does someone **teach school staff** about asthma, asthma management plans, and asthma medicines? Does someone **teach all students** about asthma and how to help a classmate who has it?
7. Do students have **good options for fully and safely participating in physical education** class and recess? (For example, do students have access to their medicine before exercise? Can they choose modified or alternative activities when medically necessary?)

If the answer to any question is no, students may be facing obstacles to asthma control. Asthma out of control can hinder a student's attendance, participation, and progress in school. School staff, health professionals, and parents can work together to remove obstacles and to promote students' health and education.

Contact the organizations listed for information about asthma and helpful ideas for making school policies and practices more asthma-friendly. Federal and State laws are there to help children with asthma.

Asthma can be controlled; expect nothing less.



Walkthrough Inspection Checklist

Name: _____

School: _____

Room or Area: _____ Date Completed: _____

Signature: _____

Instructions

1. Read the *IAQ Background* and the Background Information for this checklist.
2. Keep the Background Information and make a copy of the checklist for future reference.
3. Complete the Checklist.
 - Check the “yes,” “no,” or “not applicable” box beside each item. (A “no” response requires further attention.)
 - Make comments in the “Notes” section as necessary.
4. Return the checklist portion of this document to the IAQ Coordinator.

1. GROUND LEVEL

	Yes	No	N/A
1a. Ensured that offices are dusted and vacuumed regularly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1a. Ensured that ventilation units operate properly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1b. Ensured there are no obstructions blocking air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1c. Checked for nests and droppings near outdoor air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1d. Determined that dumpsters are located away from doors, windows, and outdoor air intakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1e. Checked potential sources of air contaminants near the building (chimneys, stacks, industrial plants, exhaust from nearby buildings).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1f. Ensured that vehicles avoid idling near outdoor air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1g. Minimized pesticide application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1h. Ensured that there is proper drainage away from the building (including roof downspouts)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1i. Ensured that sprinklers spray away from the building and outdoor air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1j. Ensured that walk-off mats are used at exterior entrances and that they are cleaned regularly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. ROOF

While on the roof, consider inspecting the HVAC units (use the Ventilation Checklist).

2a. Ensured that the roof is in good condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2b. Checked for evidence of water ponding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2c. Checked that ventilation units operate properly (air flows in).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2d. Ensured that exhaust fans operate properly (air flows out).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2e. Ensured that air intakes remain open, even at minimum setting.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2f. Checked for nests and droppings near outdoor air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2g. Ensured that air from plumbing stacks and exhaust outlets flows away from outdoor air intakes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. ATTIC

3a. Checked for evidence of roof and plumbing leaks.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3b. Checked for birds and animal nests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

4a. Ensured that temperature and humidity are maintained within acceptable ranges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4b. Ensured that no obstructions exist in supply and exhaust vents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (continued)

- | | Yes | No | N/A |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4c. Checked for odors | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4d. Checked for signs of mold and mildew growth | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4e. Checked for signs of water damage | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4f. Checked for evidence of pests and obvious food sources | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4g. Noted and reviewed all concerns from school occupants | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



5. BATHROOMS AND GENERAL PLUMBING

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 5a. Ensured that bathrooms and restrooms have operating exhaust fans | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5b. Ensured proper drain trap maintenance: | | | |
| Water is poured down floor drains once per week (approx. 1 quart of water) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Water is poured into sinks at least once per week (about 2 cups of water)..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Toilets are flushed at least once per week..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. MAINTENANCE SUPPLIES

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6a. Ensured that chemicals are used only with adequate ventilation and when building is unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6b. Ensured that vents in chemical and trash storage areas are operating properly | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6c. Ensured that portable fuel containers are properly closed..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6d. Ensured that power equipment, like snowblowers and lawn mowers, have been serviced and maintained according to manufacturers' guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. COMBUSTION APPLIANCES

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7a. Checked for combustion gas and fuel odors | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7b. Ensured that combustion appliances have flues or exhaust hoods | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7c. Checked for leaks, disconnections, and deterioration | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7d. Ensured there is no soot on inside or outside of flue components | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. OTHER

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8a. Checked for peeling and flaking paint (if the building was built before 1980, this could be a lead hazard)..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8b. Determined date of last radon test..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

NOTES