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# Support Staff Responsibilities

## Important Points

**Members of the support staff and the office staff should be prepared to recognize the symptoms of breathing difficulties and know how to respond appropriately.**

**The support staff should help other school staff members understand the nature of asthma.**

**Support staff should work with students and parents to make school a successful experience.**

**Knowledge of resources and appropriate referral processes help provide assistance.**

**Coordinating efforts with the school nurse will help ensure student success.**

Members of the school's support staff including guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, and various therapists have a responsibility to promote the growth, development, and learning of every student. Additionally they need to help school personnel understand that asthma is an airway disorder that affects breathing, not an emotional or a psychological disease. It is not "all in the student's head." Physical responses to strong emotions, such as laughing or crying, can trigger an asthma episode, because rapid breathing mechanically irritates and constrict the inflamed airways. However, these emotions do not "cause" asthma.

Students who have asthma may need additional support to promote their educational success. It is important that the support staff knows these students and is ready to intercede if help is needed. A brief meeting at the beginning of the school year with students and parents can be an excellent preventive measure. This is especially true if difficulties have been encountered in previous school years.

There are a variety of ways in which the support staff can assist students with asthma. Examples of helpful measures include:

- requesting homework adaptations during periods of illness
- assessing absenteeism patterns
- interpreting the needs of students with asthma to teaching staff
- counseling students who are dealing with stress due to their diagnoses
- promoting independence and self-care consistent with the student's abilities
- encouraging students who may use asthma as an avoidance mechanism
- intervening in instances of harassment.
- making a referral to Children's Medical Services (CMS) through the school nurse

These measures may need to be addressed either through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or the development of a 504 plan as appropriate.

Often families who are dealing with the consequences of a chronic illness need additional help and understanding to cope effectively. Outlining behavioral strategies that improve adherence to treatment may prove useful when students have poorly controlled asthma. The support staff is ideally suited to be a listening board and help in the development of strategies to deal with the stress being felt by family members.

Access to care and poverty are issues that families of children with

asthma often face. Coordinating efforts with the school nursing staff can lead to the identification of agencies and resources able to provide additional support. Families may need help in working through the Medicaid process to obtain care and/or reimbursement.

New Mexico provides a wide range of services through Children's Medical Services (CMS). These services are designed to improve health and prevent and reduce the impact of disease and disability in eligible infants, children, and adolescents. Examples of situations that would warrant referral to CMS include:

- child has no medical home
- child has no insurance and/or resources to pay for medications
- child does not get to medical appointments for asthma management and a referral to Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) is not warranted
- child has been to the ER or been hospitalized for asthma in the past year
- child and/ or family cannot provide the school with appropriate asthma medications and equipment for asthma management
- child and/or family need more asthma education.

CMS offices are located in most New Mexico counties. The contact number is 1-877-890-4692. Phone listings may be found in the Government pages section under New Mexico State Government - Health Department – Districts I-V.

**Knowledge of resources and appropriate referral processes are needed to provide assistance.**

**Coordinating efforts with the school nurse will help ensure student success.**

## **Office Staff Responsibilities**

Members of the office staff are an important part of the support system for students with asthma and allergies. Emergency situations are often reported to the office or students experiencing an asthma episode may choose to go there for assistance. Consequently, office staff members should be familiar with the symptoms associated with breathing difficulties and should know how to provide immediate assistance and how to obtain additional help. They need to be familiar with the school's asthma emergency management plan and should be included in any asthma in-service education programs.

# Emergency Care Algorithm

## ASTHMA/WHEEZING OR DIFFICULTY BREATHING

