



National
Association of
School Nurses



Joint Statement on Improving Asthma Management in Schools

This statement outlines best practices and proven, effective strategies for a comprehensive approach to asthma management in schools. The following health and school-based organizations support the recommendations outlined below: American Association of School Administrators, American Lung Association, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Center for Green Schools at USGBC, Healthy Schools Campaign, Merck Childhood Asthma Network, Inc., National Association of School Nurses, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association Health Information Network.

Schools are responsible for providing a healthy learning environment that supports the academic success of all students. In the United States, over 7 million children have asthma.¹ Of the absences caused by chronic conditions, asthma is one of the biggest contributors, causing over 10 million missed school days annually.² In a classroom of thirty, an average of three students will have asthma. When a child's asthma is well controlled, he or she stays in class, performs better academically, parents can remain at work and the community can benefit as a whole.

The Environmental Protection Agency has compiled data that shows how student performance is enhanced when children learn in a healthy school environment.³ Students and school personnel face a host of issues directly related to asthma – potential asthma emergencies, absenteeism, decreased student and teacher productivity, increased visits to the school health office, access to life-saving emergency medications, and indoor and outdoor air quality to name a few. Schools must be prepared to manage these issues, creating a school environment that will promote student learning and wellbeing.

In 2009, the American Lung Association convened a multi-disciplinary group of stakeholders to review current literature and identify policy strategies that would have the greatest impact on the burden of asthma in the U.S. The findings from this group were vetted by a broad range of experts and led to the release of the National Asthma Public Policy Agenda, which focused policy recommendations for schools,

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey Raw Data, 2011. Analysis performed by the American Lung Association Research and Health Education Division using SPSS and SUDAAN software.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality: United States, 2005-2009. National Health Statistics Reports; Number 32. January 12, 2011.

³ Environmental Protection Agency. IAQ Tools for Schools. Improved Academic Performance: Evidence from Scientific Literature. http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/student_performance/evidence.html.

workplaces, homes, healthcare systems and financing, public health infrastructure and surveillance, and outdoor air. Within the school category, two primary areas of focus were outlined: (1) supporting comprehensive asthma management for students and (2) addressing the entire school environment.

The following policy strategies will promote healthier, asthma-friendly learning environments for students:

All school systems should adopt and implement a comprehensive plan for the management of asthma that is based on current research and best practices.

- Identify and monitor all students with a diagnosis of asthma.
- Obtain individualized Asthma Action Plans for all students with asthma to monitor and manage symptoms and reduce exposure to potential asthma triggers.
- Establish well-communicated, step-by-step standard emergency protocols for students without Asthma Action Plans as well as undiagnosed students with respiratory distress.
- Educate all school personnel (especially health service professionals, teachers, physical education teachers, and coaches) about asthma, including how to handle an asthma emergency.
- Provide a full-time registered nurse in every school, every day, all day.
- Ensure students with asthma know the policies and procedures to self-carry, self-administer and have access to quick relief medications (i.e., albuterol inhaler).
- Ensure that students whose asthma is not well controlled are provided with self-management education and case management.

All school systems should adopt and implement an environmental assessment and management plan that addresses environmental asthma triggers.

- Develop and implement indoor air quality (IAQ) management plans that address dampness problems, mold contamination, maintenance and repairs, cleaning, integrated pest management, and other factors as detailed in the Environmental Protection Agency's IAQ Tools for Schools.
- Require schools, grounds, facilities, vehicles and sponsored events to be 100 percent tobacco-free.
- Establish a protocol to minimize student exposure to outdoor air pollutants, including days with unhealthy levels of air pollution as well as pollution caused by bus and car idling.

By taking proactive steps to diminish the impact of asthma in the classroom, schools can reduce the number of asthma-related absences, reduce the number of asthma emergencies, and help safeguard students, faculty, and staff. More importantly, an asthma-friendlier atmosphere creates a healthier environment for all people, not just those affected by asthma.

Additional resources can be found at the following websites:

American Association of Schools Administrators (www.aasa.org)

American Lung Association (www.lung.org/afsi)

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (www.aafa.org)

Center for Green Schools at USGBC (www.centerforgreenschools.org)

Healthy Schools Campaign (www.healthyschoolscampaign.org)

Merck Childhood Asthma Network, Inc. (<http://www.mcanonline.org/nea-managing-asthma.html>)

National Association of School Nurses (<http://www.nasn.org/ToolsResources/Asthma>)

National Association of State Boards of Education (<http://www.nasbe.org/project/center-for-safe-and-healthy-schools/>)

National Education Association Health Information Network (www.neahin.org)