



Teaching Staff Responsibilities

Important Points

Teachers should identify students with asthma and allergies at the start of the school year.

Students with asthma should be encouraged to participate fully in all school opportunities.

The classroom should be free of potential asthma “triggers.”

Sensitivity to the needs of students with asthma and food allergies is essential.

Remember to use the school nurse as a resource to learn more about asthma and its management, especially the school’s asthma emergency plan.

Food allergies can be life threatening.

Considering the number of hours students with asthma will spend in the school environment, every member of the teaching staff has a role in helping and supporting these students. Recognizing and being sensitive to their needs will go a long way in ensuring that students with asthma fit into the school environment. When they are encouraged and feel comfortable about having their needs met, students will be more likely to attend school and be better achievers.

As the school year begins it is important to know which students have been diagnosed with asthma and allergies and what triggers are likely to start an asthma episode. The school nurse can provide the appropriate information. Potential classroom triggers can include chalk dust, pets, mold, fragrances, cold air, and stress to name a few. Because it is possible for an episode to occur anywhere (classroom, playing field, cafeteria, school bus, field trip), it is essential for every staff member to be able to identify the onset of asthma symptoms and be prepared to help the student. The school nurse is an excellent resource for helping with classroom trigger identification and asthma management. Everyone shares a major responsibility in asthma management and should know what to do in the event of an emergency.

In addition to being knowledgeable about asthma and its management, the teaching staff has a responsibility to be sensitive to the special needs of students with asthma. Some students may already have an individualized education plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. Every student with asthma deserves:

- encouragement to participate in all school classes and activities (assigning a “buddy” may help promote participation)
- the opportunity to carry and self-administer medications when the ability has been demonstrated
- a plan for making up missed schoolwork agreed upon by the student and parents and established at the start of the school year
- educated and understanding classmates
- assistance in being independent in asthma management.

The teaching staff will need to think and plan ahead for activities such as field trips, science classes, and parties to allow students with asthma to participate. They must not be made to feel different or responsible for making classmates miss out on opportunities.

Because teaching staff members spend a considerable amount of time with students, they are in an ideal situation to recognize when a student's asthma symptoms are worsening. They may even be the first to identify a student with undiagnosed asthma due to repeated coughing in the classroom or outdoors. It is very important to report symptoms or symptom changes to the school nurse and parents. This information is extremely helpful in better management of asthma.

**Untreated food allergies
have caused death.**

Ensuring that the classroom is an asthma friendly environment also requires some thought and planning, as well as cooperation from the custodial staff. Rooms must be kept as dust free and clean as possible. Bookshelves, rugs, lamps, stuffed furniture and toys, chalkboards, erasers, windowsills, and pets can be sources of dust and dander. Odors from paints, markers, perfumes, sprays, scented candles, smoke, and cleaning supplies need to be avoided. Mold can develop from over-watered plants, leaks, or any source of standing water. During heavy pollen seasons, opening windows for fresh air may be problematic. Classrooms need to be fun, interesting places to learn not sterile, lifeless environments. Achieving an appropriate balance is far from easy and will require cooperation from students, staff, and parents.

Additionally teaching staff members need to be aware of **food allergies** and the problems associated with them. Research suggests that children with asthma are at a greater risk for severe allergic reactions to foods. The eight foods that account for 90% of allergic reactions are **peanuts, eggs, fish, milk, wheat, soy, tree nuts (walnuts and pecans), and shellfish**. Classroom parties, field trips, and the celebration of special events, such as birthdays, will require planning to avoid an allergy episode. Again, the school nurse can provide information on students with food allergies and the precautions that need to be taken.