

**GREENWICH CENTRAL SCHOOL
HEALTH OFFICES**

ASTHMA

Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood. It is an inflammatory condition of the bronchial airways. This inflammation makes the normal functioning of the airways (breathing) difficult. Increased mucus is produced, and as a result, the tiny airways become plugged. This causes chest tightness, coughing and wheezing. If severe enough, shortness of breath and low blood oxygen can develop. An estimated 4 million children under 18 yrs. old have had an asthma attack, and many others have hidden or undiagnosed asthma. Asthma is the most common cause of school absenteeism due to chronic disease. Even though asthma cannot be cured, it can almost always be controlled.

Childhood asthma is a disorder with familial predispositions and a strong allergic component. Approximately 75-80 percent of children with asthma have significant allergies. The following are signs and symptoms of asthma: wheezing is characteristic of asthma but it is not its most common symptom, coughing is noted with even hidden asthma when wheezing may not be apparent to the child or his family. Any child who has frequent coughing or respiratory infections (pneumonia or bronchitis) should be evaluated for asthma. The child, who coughs after running or crying, may have asthma. Recurrent night cough is common as asthma is often worse at night. Chest tightness and shortness of breath are other symptoms of asthma that may occur alone or in combination with any of the above symptoms.

Episodes of asthma often are triggered by some condition or stimulus: Exercise can trigger an episode. Inhaler medications used prior to exercise can prevent most episodes. Respiratory infections frequently trigger severe episodes of asthma and are often viral not bacterial, so antibiotics do not help. Chronic sinusitis due to bacteria can also be a stubborn trigger of asthma. Allergies to pollen, food, mold, and animals are also triggers of asthma. Daily exposure to these allergens may result in a gradual worsening of asthma. Weather plays a part in asthma exacerbations. Cold air triggers asthma. Pulmonary function studies have shown that breathing cold air provokes asthma in most children. Precautions may be necessary to avoid inhalation of cold air, such as a ski mask or a scarf worn loosely over the nose and mouth. The weather affects outdoor inhalant allergens such as mold and pollen. For example, a light rain might wash out pollen, but increase mold concentration. Emotional factors are not the cause of asthma, however, emotional stress can frequently trigger asthma. Cigarette smoke, air pollution, strong odors, aerosol sprays, and paint fumes are highly irritating and should be avoided in the home of any child with asthma.

REMEMBER---Any child who has frequent coughing or respiratory infections should be evaluated for asthma. Asthma is not curable but it is controllable.