



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF

HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H.

Commissioner

DOHMH Advisory #19: *Health Department urges health care providers to help children prepare for the fall asthma season*

August 24, 2011

- **Childhood asthma often worsens in the fall with hospitalization rates more than tripling from summertime lows.**
- **Health care providers should prepare children with asthma for the fall by scheduling a check up NOW to make sure they and their parents have the right medications and management plan.**
- **Inhaled corticosteroids are the most effective treatment for children with persistent asthma.**
- **Children with asthma should receive seasonal influenza vaccines when available.**

Dear Colleagues:

Each fall, there is a surge in asthma hospitalizations and emergency department visits, especially among children. Illness rates can increase three-fold from summertime lows (see figure 1 below). A medical regimen that achieves good control during the summer months may not be sufficient to prevent exacerbation of asthma related to fall asthma triggers. Providers should work with children and parents now, **before school opens this fall**, to make sure that they are on the most effective treatment, that their asthma is under control, and that they have an Asthma Action Plan for both maintenance medications and for handling exacerbations. Inhaled corticosteroids (ICS) are the most effective treatment for persistent asthma. In 2010-11 only 50% of NYC public school students with asthma had an order for rescue medication for use in school.

Medical providers should:

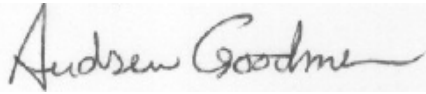
- **Assess asthma control at each visit**
 - Ensure that children with persistent asthma are on are on inhaled corticosteroids as per the NHLBI guidelines¹.
 - Make sure children are prescribed spacers with their inhalers (for both rescue medications and long-term controllers), and review inhalation technique and spacer use. Rescue medication inhalers are as effective as nebulizers, easier to use, and require less time out of class for treatments.
 - Make sure that all **school-aged** children with asthma have a **Medication Administration form (MAF)** for medication services at school, and an **Asthma Action Plan** for everyday management and responding to exacerbations.
 - Know that authorizing administration of inhaled corticosteroids in school may be a useful strategy for those patients with poorly controlled asthma and adherence problems.²
 - Make sure all children in early childhood programs are given a completed Asthma Action Plan
 - Know that schools offer stock albuterol to students with a completed MAF on file for albuterol.
- Review asthma triggers and develop an individual trigger avoidance plan. Special emphasis should be given to ensuring smoke-free environments for children with asthma. Referrals can be made to the NYS Health Department Quit Line for free nicotine replacement therapy (<http://www.nysmokefree.com/>).
- Administer inactivated influenza vaccine to children with asthma per current recommendations (see <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/downloads/child/mmwr-child-schedule.pdf> for details)
- Discuss the importance of prompt treatment of influenza.
- Call parents of children with asthma NOW to schedule a pre-back to school visit, and continue this practice each year.

Providers should systematically identify and follow-up with patients who have persistent asthma. An electronic health record system (EHR) can improve adherence to best practice guidelines and can help providers identify patients in need of outreach. The Primary Care Information Project (PCIP) helps providers pay for and implement an EHR system. Visit <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pcip/pcip.shtml> for more information. For more information about asthma among NYC children and for provider asthma training, call 311.

¹ Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/index.htm>

² Halterman, J.S., et al., Randomized Controlled Trial to Improve Care for Urban Children With Asthma: Results of the School-Based Asthma Therapy Trial. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med, 2011. 165(3): p. 262-268.

Thank you,



Andrew Goodman, MD, MPH
Deputy Commissioner
Health Promotion, Disease Prevention



Thomas Matte, MD, MPH
Assistant Commissioner
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy

Hospital admissions for asthma, New York City,
ages 2-17, daily average by date, 2002-2007

