

## Keep your Sneeze from Turning into a Wheeze

### Colds or Flu Viruses are Leading Cause of Asthma Exacerbations

Respiratory infections, such as the common cold or influenza (flu), are a nuisance for anyone. But if you have asthma, a stuffy nose, sore throat, cough and fever might just be the beginning of your symptoms. Colds and flu viruses are the most common trigger for people with asthma than can cause of worsening asthma symptoms including wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and increased mucus.

People with asthma are not more susceptible to cold and flu viruses, but they do often experience more severe symptoms cause by increased inflammation and narrowing of the airways. These symptoms lead to asthma exacerbations that are a leading cause of hospitalizations and emergency department visits for children.

#### Preventing colds and the flu

Preventing colds and the flu are the best way to avoid increased asthma symptoms:

- **Get an annual flu shot:** Most adults and children older than 6 months of age should get a flu vaccination every year. If you do get a vaccination, you'll need a shot since nasal spray vaccinations aren't recommended for people with asthma. [Flu Vaccine Finder](#)
- **Ask your doctor about the pneumonia vaccination:** Older adults with asthma have an increased you risk of developing pneumonia after having the flu.
- **Avoid contact with people who have a cold or the flu:** Germs that cause respiratory infections are easily passed from person to person.
- **Wash your hands often.** This kills the germs that can cause respiratory infections. Carry a bottle of hand sanitizer to kill germs while you're on the go.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.** These are the points where germs enter your body.

#### What to do when you do get a cold or the flu

Despite your best efforts to stay healthy, an occasional cold or case of the flu is inevitable — especially in children. These steps may help:

- **Follow your asthma action plan.** Continue taking your daily controller medication. If you notice increase in symptoms including coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath, take your reliever and any other medications listed in the yellow zone. If you do not have an asthma action plan, talk to your doctor about creating one.

- **Call your doctor if your asthma begins to flare up when you're sick.** If you have the flu, early treatment with an antiviral medication may help you recover more quickly. Ask your doctor about over-the-counter cold and flu treatments to help with your non-asthma symptoms.
- **Rest and stay home.** Rest and drink plenty of fluids. Stay home from school or work to avoid infecting others. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Generally, you can infect others a day before your symptoms appear and for up to a week or so afterward.
- **Seek help right away for severe symptoms.** Seek medical attention if you have a difficult time breathing or if you have any signs or symptoms of pneumonia, such as a high fever, chills, sweats, sharp pain when taking deep breaths or a cough that brings up colored phlegm.

Be aware of worsening asthma symptoms as prompt treatment can help ease symptoms and prevent a mild asthma flare-up from progressing to a severe asthma attack. For more information about asthma and the effects of cold and flu viruses visit [www.Lung.org](http://www.Lung.org) or you can call the Lung Helpline at 1-800-LUNG-USA or 1-800-586-4721).