

health matters

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Fall Season **ALERT!**

For parents of asthmatic children:

“Do not let asthma flare-ups take your child by surprise!”

~ see page 2 for full Alert

health matters

is brought to you by

El Centro
Regional Medical Center

An Agency of the City of El Centro

Living with **ASTHMA** in the Imperial Valley

*You can hear yourself breathe. Anyone within earshot can hear you cough. You're bone weary from lack of sleep because lying down only exacerbates the coughing. **That is ASTHMA.***

Imperial County is said to have up to three times the normal asthma rate among school age children and younger.

Asthma is a chronic lung condition induced by a tightening of air passages to the lungs that deprive them of enough air to breathe. Asthma can develop at any age and is common in childhood. American Lung Association statistics show asthma affects 7 to 10 percent of the pediatric population in the United States and nationwide accounts for 24 percent of school absenteeism.

Dr. George Hancock, a pulmonologist on the El Centro Regional Medical Center medical staff, attributes the prevalence of asthma in Imperial County to the desert. There is a higher ratio of organic matter in the air, some natural like dust and pollen, and some generated by agriculture and other border industries.

Imperial County is said to have up to three times the normal asthma rate among school age children and younger. An asthma attack can be recognized by a number of symptoms, breathing difficulty, wheezing, coughing, chest pains and chest tightness.

Only about 15 percent of Dr. Hancock's patients are school age children, however. As a specialist, he sees only the most severe cases, those referred by primary care physicians who treat the majority of childhood asthma cases. He said most of his asthma patients are older because the disease tends to be more severe among the adult population.

A good share of his work with asthma patients, he adds, involves educating them on the "pathology of the disease." In the event of an asthma episode, he said, "they'll know better about what to do if they understand what is happening to them."

As for when to seek help, he suggests that "if a patient becomes aware of a significant increase in the use of an inhaler, perhaps more than two or three times in any four to six hour period, it is time to get help, either see a doctor or go to emergency."

"It is important for asthmatics to realize that this is a chronic disease," he said, "involving chronic and dangerous inflammations. It is vital to control inflammation to avoid long term damage."

For the last three years, El Centro Regional Hospital has been the vanguard agency attempting to bring relief to young asthma

sufferers. Two grant-financed programs, the California Asthma Among School-Age Children project (CAASA) and the Community Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA) have been ongoing and a third program, the Imperial Valley Child Asthma program, funded under new grants of nearly \$275,000 from the Imperial County Children and Families First Commission, has been launched.

Aide Fulton, R.N., coordinator for the hospital's asthma programs, said more than 7,200 Imperial County youth, 5 to 18 years of age, have been identified as asthmatics. Many required treatment in the hospital's two Valley Family Care Centers in El Centro and Calexico or from private physicians. Dr. James Ellis, a pediatric allergist, is the program consultant.

While CAASA has sought to identify, diagnose and train asthmatic children and their parents in how to cope with the disease through self-management, CAFA is more interested in the environment, eliminating the triggers that cause asthma. Triggers are said to be everywhere, in the home as well as in the outside air.

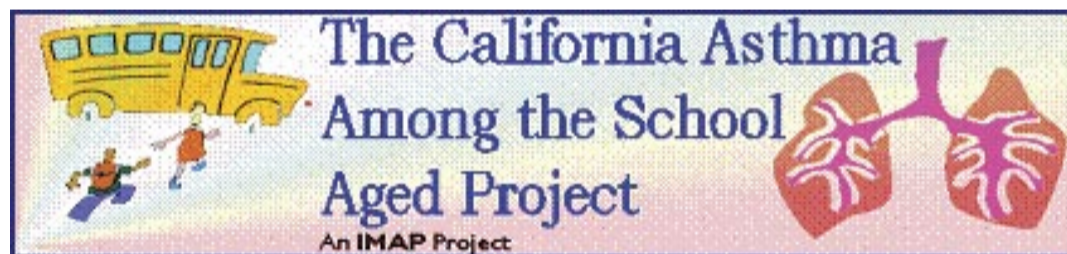
Household triggers include dust, mold, second hand smoke, certain insects, pets, and even blankets and stuffed toys can



Dr. George Hancock is a pulmonologist on staff at El Centro Regional Medical Center.

harbor dust mites. Outside triggers include ozone, small particulates, pollen, respiratory infections and in some cases exercise.

The county grant will aim at teaching parents how to cope with young asthma sufferers, using National Institute of Health guidelines. The training also will be offered to teachers and other staff members of area pre-schools.



The Imperial Valley Child Asthma program was funded under grants from the Imperial County Children and Families First Commission totaling nearly \$275,000. The California Asthma Among School-Age Children project (CAASA) and the Community Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA) are two additional grant-financed programs that have been ongoing.

ASTHMA, What You Need to Know

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is long-standing (chronic) disease in which the airways are inflamed.

Asthma goes by many names: wheezy bronchitis, asthmatic bronchitis, bronchial asthma and reactive airway disease (RAD). It is often misdiagnosed as acute bronchitis or pneumonia.

The words "asthma episode," "asthma attack" and "asthma flare" all have the same meaning. "Airways" and "bronchioles" refer to air passages in the lungs.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE AIRWAYS?

People with asthma have airways that are "hyper-responsive." This means that their airways react to asthma triggers such as colds, cigarette smoke and cigarette smoke and exercise faster and more intensely than people whose airways are normal. During an asthma episode:

- The lining of the airways becomes inflamed, swells and produces more mucus. This makes the opening in the airways smaller.
- The muscles around the airways tighten, also making the opening in the airways smaller.

TRIGGERS

A Trigger is any object, act or event that causes the airways to become inflamed or causes asthma symptoms.

Some triggers are:

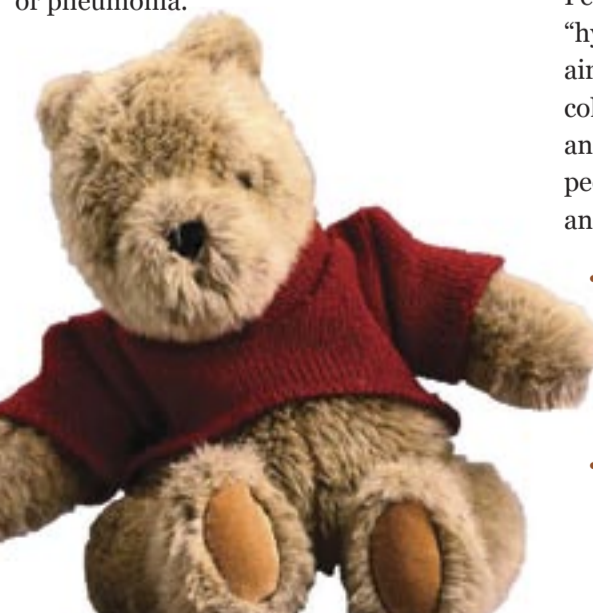
- Exercise
- Virus infection (cold, bronchitis, pneumonia)
- Pollution like cigarette smoke, smoke from a wood stove or perfume
- Allergens, such as cats, dogs, mites, cockroaches, grass, mold and pollen
- Cold air, coughing, yelling and laughing
- Some medicines and chemicals



Triggers add up. Some people only develop an asthma episode if two or three triggers are present.

see Triggers page 2

For more information, please contact Karla I. Matus, CAFA Coordinator at (760) 336-2785.



Our Family Serving Yours

ASTHMA, What You Need to Know

Triggers, from page 1

AVOIDING TRIGGERS

To help control asthma, avoid triggers:

- Do not allow smoking in your house or car
- Remove objects that collect dust (e.g., stuffed animals) from the bedroom
- Consider covering heating vents with an air filter
- Keep humidity in your house between 25 and 50 percent
- Do not use a vaporizer or humidifier that increases the humidity above 50 percent because mold and mites will grow better

EXERCISE

Exercise is one trigger you should NOT avoid!

Exercise is the most common trigger of asthma. Your asthma plan is not satisfactory if exercise causes:

- Cough
- A tight chest
- Wheeze

Almost every person with asthma should be fully active and be able to play any sport. With the right plan, you should be able to run as fast and as long as anyone else, except during an asthma episode.

COUGHING & ASTHMA

Coughing may be the first sign that your asthma is not under control. People with asthma often cough:

- At night
- With exercise
- In smoky areas
- After laughing or crying
- In cold air

It can be very hard to tell an asthma cough from the cough of a regular cold. Asthma medicine will help to control an asthma cough. If the cough continues after your asthma is fully treated, a cough medicine may help.

For more information, please contact Karla I. Matus, CAFA Coordinator at (760) 336-2785.

Questions to Ask when your Asthma ISN'T GETTING BETTER?



you to. Many people with asthma don't follow their doctor's advice about taking their medicine. Many trips to the Emergency room and most asthma hospitalizations could be prevented if patients would take their medicines as prescribed by their physician.

3. Is it something in my environment?

Many people with asthma are sensitive to something in the environment (at home, work, or school). Getting rid of the triggers or things you are allergic or sensitive to, can help your asthma medicine work better.

4. Is it because I do not know how to recognize asthma symptoms?

Many people do not pay attention to early warning signs of asthma. Some of the early warning signs are: decrease in peak flow reading, coughing/dry cough, wheezing, chest tightness, difficult breathing/shortness of breath, feeling nervous/irritable, restlessness, not sleeping well, tired, dizziness, decrease

in exercise tolerance, and feeling weak. Different people have different symptoms, it is important that you learn to "listen" to your own body and determine what symptoms are early warning signs for you.

5. Is it because I'm not using my inhaler the right way?

Asthma inhalers may not be used correctly and you may not get enough medicine into your lungs. If you do not feel comfortable in how to use your medication device, it is important that you contact your doctor or asthma educator for proper training.

6. Do I need to change medicines?

There are many medicines to use for asthma. If the medicines you take now don't seem to be helping, other medicines may work better. Talk to your doctor about your concerns.

For more asthma information, please contact Aide Fulton RN, BSN- Child Asthma Coordinator (760) 482-0978

1. Is it because I don't know about asthma?

Learning to manage your asthma is very important. Talk about your asthma with your doctor or asthma educator.

2. Is it because I'm not taking my medicine the right way?

In order for your medicine to work, you must take it the way your doctor tells

Fall Season Alert!

For parents of asthmatic children:

"Do not let asthma flare-ups take your child by surprise!"

October is the beginning of the cold and flu season. It is important that you take your child to your pediatrician for an asthma follow up, and to refill asthma medication. Your pediatrician may prescribe new asthma medication, or may order that your child receive the flu shot.

It is better to be prepared to avoid unnecessary visits to the ER, or admission to the hospital during this fall.

- Asthma symptoms and asthma attacks are not normal.
- One asthma attack can be too many!

A message from the Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program

FIRST AID



FOR ASTHMA

Severe Symptoms May Include:

- Difficulty Speaking
- Difficulty Breathing
- Difficulty Walking
- Strained Neck Muscles
- Fearful
- Peak Flow Meter in Red Zone

What to do in an Emergency:

1. Stay calm, speak reassuringly & provide privacy
2. Seat upright, relax shoulders & do not recline
3. Follow asthma action plan, medicate immediately & call health professional
4. If no improvement after 5 minutes, call 911
5. Call 911 immediately if lips & nails are blue

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Staff Writer Robert V. Liggett
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FREE Services from the Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program

Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program



The Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program is funded by The Imperial County Children and Families First Commission. The leading agency is El Centro Regional Medical Center. The Imperial Valley Child Asthma project is designed to reduce health disparities, and to improve the development and school readiness of young children from birth through age five that suffer from asthma or asthma symptoms by linking improved clinical care to the community and our community health worker.

The Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program is funded by grants from:



About the Program

Successful asthma management has been shown to help physicians and their asthma patients reduce the severity of symptoms, emergency department visits, and the loss of work or school days because of asthma. The Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program follows the National Institute of Health Guidelines.

What you will learn:

- Individualized asthma education
- Proper use & understanding of your child's asthma medications
- Identification of common asthma triggers and avoidance information
- Early symptom recognition and use of a written asthma plan
- Training on the use of asthma equipment: peak flow meter, spacer, Pulmo-Aid Machine, and more

The Goal

Uncontrolled Asthma adversely affects the quality of life of the child with asthma and his/her family. It causes restrictions and many nights of lost sleep, for both the parents and the child.

The goal of Child Asthma Project is to improve health outcomes of young children from birth through age five with asthma or asthma-related symptoms.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

Parents of children with asthma can benefit from education given in their home setting by a trained community health worker. Parents will actively engage in lessons which will increase their knowledge about their child's asthma.

Children registered in the program will be provided with at least two FREE visits by the community health worker to monitor their progress if indicated by their medical provider.

How to Participate

Your clinic or Health Care provider can provide you with a free referral. If you do not have a Medical Provider, please call (760) 482-0978.