



# ASTHMA

*"The important thing to remember is that you can control your asthma."*

*U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
"Basic Facts About Asthma"*

## Did you know...?

- Over 20 million people in the United States suffer from asthma?<sup>1</sup>
- Over 6.3 million children under 18 report having asthma?<sup>2</sup>
- Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization in the United States?<sup>3</sup>

## What is it?

**Asthma is a lung disease.** It causes people to wheeze, cough, be short of breath, and sometimes even die. People with asthma can suffer from frequent periods of difficulty breathing called "asthma attacks." During an attack, the airways swell, the muscles around them tighten, and the airways produce thick yellow mucous.

**Asthma is not contagious, but it does run in families.** If parents have asthma, their children are more likely to develop it too.

Children, particularly those living in low-income urban households, are especially at risk for developing asthma. "African-American children in low-income households have more severe asthma and are at greater risk of death."<sup>4</sup>

Each person is different, but many things (called asthma "triggers") can cause asthma attacks. These can be found both outdoors and indoors and include:

- Cold weather
- Pollen
- Exercise
- Stress
- Dust and dust mites
- Cockroaches
- Mold
- Pet dander (skin flakes)
- Rodents
- Tobacco smoke
- Air fresheners



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes



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**Mold is a common asthma trigger.**



Photo by: January E. Jones, Improving Kids' Environment

## What can you do?

There are three steps you can take to reduce asthma symptoms.

### 1. Keep a clean home.

- Make sure that your home is free of dust, mold, smoke, and other potential triggers.
- Vacuum often using a vacuum with a HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filter or microfiltration bag, if possible.
- Clear crumbs, drips, spills, and dirty dishes immediately.
- Identify and quickly fix water leaks in your home.

### 2. Keep people with asthma away from dust, dust mites, and smoke.

- Use zippered "allergen resistant" mattress and pillow covers to prevent contact with dust mite allergens.
- Keep pets outdoors or away from sleeping areas; clear hairs from carpets and furniture.
- Quit smoking, or smoke only outside your home and car. Always keep tobacco smoke away from children.
- Wash bed sheets weekly in hot water (130 F) to kill dust mites.
- Keep people with asthma out of a room while vacuuming or dusting.
- Keep foods stored in tightly sealed containers to avoid attracting cockroaches and rodents.

### 3. Get medical advice and follow the doctor's instructions.

- Get medical attention for breathing problems.
- Get emergency medical care for bad attacks of shortness of breath or wheezing.
- Work with your doctor to develop an asthma management plan.
- Take all prescribed medication, either to prevent attacks or to lessen the symptoms.
- Find out what allergies you have so you can avoid these potential asthma triggers.

For more information . . .

Visit HUD's website at [www.hud.gov/healthyhomes](http://www.hud.gov/healthyhomes) for more information about addressing health hazards in homes or to learn if HUD has a Healthy Homes program in your community. From this website, you can download a copy of "Help Yourself to A Healthy Home" for more practical steps you can take to make your home a healthy home.

### Other Federal Resources

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

US Environmental Protection Agency  
[www.epa.gov/children](http://www.epa.gov/children)

### Other Resources

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
[www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)

The Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA)  
[www.aanma.org](http://www.aanma.org)

Ask your doctor or contact your local or state department of health.

**Cockroaches can trigger asthma. Use traps, gel bait, and cleaning to deal with roaches.**



Photo by: January E. Jones, Improving Kids' Environment

<sup>1</sup>"Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use, and Mortality, 2000-2001," National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup>Environmental Health Watch, website [www.ehw.org/Asthma/ASTH\\_home1.htm](http://www.ehw.org/Asthma/ASTH_home1.htm). August 25, 2004

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control. Surveillance for Asthma - United States, 1980-1999, MMWR, 2002; 51 (SS-01).