

## **BACK TO SCHOOL 2012**

### **Reducing the risk of an asthma attack in February: Tips for Parents & Carers**

#### **What is the February asthma spike?**

Throughout the year there are significant increases, or 'spikes', in asthma presentations to hospitals and emergency departments<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 1 in 9 children in Australia have asthma, and for children and adolescents with asthma these 'spikes' usually occur towards the end of holiday periods as they return to school and preschool<sup>2</sup>. A significant 'spike' in asthma symptoms, and subsequent hospital admissions, of children and adolescents occurs throughout the first few weeks of February<sup>3</sup>. The following are key points that are important for parents and carers of children or teenagers to be aware of.

#### **Why does the spike occur?**

While there have not been direct links established, the February 'asthma spike' is believed to be largely due to children and adolescents coming into contact with asthma triggers that they have had time away from, as they are now returning to school.

#### **Triggers that can be encountered are:**

- Dust and mould spores from poorly ventilated, or insufficiently cleaned school/preschool rooms
- Respiratory viruses, such as cold and flu viruses
- Cleaning products that leave behind strong smells, aerosols or airborne dust
- Anxiety and stress due to returning to school/preschool

#### **What can parents and carers do to avoid asthma exacerbations at school?**

- Ensure your child is always carrying their reliever medication (*e.g. Ventolin, Asmol, Airomir and Bricanyl*) as well as a spacer. If required, also ensure that you provide medication to the preschool your child attends
- Ensure that you have provided your child's school/preschool with an updated Asthma Action Plan
- Ensure that your child or teenager knows how to recognise early symptoms of an asthma attack and know to use their reliever medication properly
- Ensure your child or teenager will seek help from school/preschool staff if they experience asthma symptoms
- Ensure that your child or teenager's asthma is being well managed and that their medication and management is reviewed annually by your GP (this is a good opportunity to also update the Asthma Action Plan)

**For more information on any of the above points, free resources please contact the  
Asthma Foundation of Victoria via the details at the top of the page**

<sup>1</sup> Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring (2011), "Asthma in Australia: with a focus chapter on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease", Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.