

## **BACK TO SCHOOL 2012 PREVENTING AN ASTHMA SPIKE IN YOUR SCHOOL**

### **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 presentations and admissions to hospital of children and adolescents, experiencing severe asthma exacerbations, occurs throughout the first few weeks of February<sup>3</sup>.

### **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 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

### **What can we do to avoid asthma exacerbations in our school?**

- Ensure your school's asthma emergency kits contain fresh and in-date reliever medication (e.g. *Ventolin*, *Asmol* or *Airomir*), a clean spacer, alcohol swabs, record sheet and kit card detailing the emergency procedure to follow
- Ensure student Asthma Action Plans are updated and returned
- Ensure staff education and training is current, arranging a free staff asthma education session as required for all new and ongoing staff
- Ensure your school's asthma policy is current for both onsite and offsite situations, and first aid posters are displayed in key locations
- Ensure staff receive asthma first aid training every three years, are aware of which students in their class experience asthma, and know where emergency kits are stored
- Ensure all classrooms are opened, cleaned and aired out in the weeks before students return to school. A helpful technique can be to turn on all fans, as well as any heating/cooling systems, to begin to clear dust before students arrive

**For more information, or to book a free staff education session, please contact the Asthma Foundation of Victoria on (03) 9326-7088 or visit: [www.asthma.org.au](http://www.asthma.org.au)**

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<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.