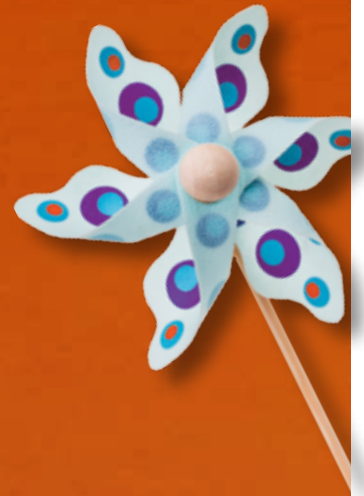


Glossary of Asthma Terms



AMES

Asthma Words to Know

Developed in partnership with Health Literacy Missouri

Airways (Bronchi, Bronchial Tubes):

The tubes in the lungs that let air in and out of the body.

Airway Obstruction: When one of the tubes in the lungs gets partly or totally blocked. This makes it hard to breathe.

Allergen: Anything that the body sees as dangerous, can cause an allergic reaction, from mild like sneezing or a rash to severe like trouble breathing. Allergens can also cause asthma symptoms. Common allergens include dust mites, pet dander, and pollen.

Allergic Reaction: When the body responds to an allergen. Common allergic reactions include itching, sneezing, a runny nose, coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.

Allergic Rhinitis: The medical term for hay fever. It's an allergic reaction that acts like a long-lasting cold. Symptoms include a stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, an itchy nose and eyes, and watery eyes.

Allergy: When the body is sensitive to certain things (allergens) and has unusual responses (allergic reactions), such as sneezing or wheezing. Allergies can make asthma worse.

Alveoli: Tiny air sacs found at the ends of the smallest airways in the lungs. They fill with air when we breathe in and shrink when we breathe out. Air (oxygen) must enter the alveoli before it can get to the rest of the body.

Anaphylaxis: A sudden, severe allergic reaction and life-threatening medical emergency.

Antihistamine: A medicine that aims to stop allergy symptoms, such as itching and swelling.

Anti-Inflammatory Medicine: A medicine that lowers or prevents swelling (inflammation) in a child's lungs to help them breathe better. It also causes the lining of their lungs to make less mucus.

Asthma: A lung disease that causes swelling (inflammation) and extra mucus in a child's airways. It also causes the muscles around their airways to squeeze. All of these changes cause trouble breathing and can make a child feel like they aren't getting enough air. Common asthma symptoms include coughing, wheezing, and chest tightness. There's no cure for asthma, but doctors can help children live a healthy active life with asthma.

Asthma Action Plan: A personal plan created with a child's doctor. It lists which medicines to take, when to take them, what to do during an asthma attack, and when to call the child's doctor or get emergency help.

Asthma Attack (Flare-Up, Episode): When asthma signs and symptoms get worse. Treat asthma attacks right away according to the child's asthma action plan.

Bacteria: Germs that can cause sinusitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, or other infections. Doctors usually treat these infections with antibiotics.

Breath Sounds: Lung sounds doctors can hear through a stethoscope.

Breathing Rate: The number of breaths a child takes per minute.

Bronchioles: The smallest branches of the airways. They connect to the tiny air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs.



Bronchodilator Medicine: A medicine that opens up a child's airways by relaxing muscles around the airways. There are two types: 1) short-acting which help relieve asthma symptoms quickly (such as albuterol) and 2) long-acting which are taken daily.

Bronchospasm (Bronchoconstriction): When the muscles in a child's lungs squeeze together due to certain triggers. This causes wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath.

Chest: The area between the neck and stomach. It contains the lungs.

Chest X-Ray: A type of x-ray that can find lung problems.

Clinical Trials: Research that carefully and safely tries new medicines, devices, or treatments with patients to find new and better ways of treating diseases.

Controller Medicine (Long-Acting Medicine): Medicine a child takes every day to help prevent asthma symptoms. It lowers swelling and sensitivity in their airways and lungs over time, not right away.

Corticosteroid-Inhaled: A controller medicine that lowers swelling (inflammation) in the lungs. This controls asthma and helps prevent asthma attacks.

Cough: To force air from the lungs quickly.

Dander: Tiny scales that fall off of animal skin or hair. It floats in the air, settles on surfaces, and is a major part of household dust. It's an allergen that may cause allergic reactions in some people. Cat dander is a classic allergen.

Decongestant: A medicine that lowers swelling (inflammation) in the nose. It also helps clear up a stuffy or runny nose.

Diagnosis: The medical answer doctors give to explain what's making someone sick.

Diaphragm: The main muscle involved in breathing. It's at the base of the lungs.

Dry Powder Inhaler (DPI): A small device filled with a dry powder medicine that a child breathes into their lungs.

Dust mites: Very tiny bugs found in household dust. They're a common allergen.

Eczema: An allergy that makes skin dry, red, itchy, and sometimes scaly and crusty. It can also cause blisters.

Environmental Control Measures: Steps you take to get rid of allergens or irritants in a certain area.

Epinephrine (Adrenaline): A medicine given as a shot during a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). It's a natural chemical that works by telling the heart to pump faster and stronger. It also opens up the airways.

Exacerbation: Asthma attacks that keep getting worse.

Exercise-Induced Asthma: When a child has asthma symptoms during or after exercise.

Exhalation: Breathing out.

Flu (Influenza): An illness that spreads easily from person to person. It causes fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, a cough, a sore throat, and a runny nose. It's often confused with the common cold, but it's more dangerous and makes people feel worse than a cold. Flu can make asthma worse and can lead to pneumonia.

HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) Filter: A filter that gets rid of tiny materials in the air (asthma triggers) by forcing it through screens with very small holes. Removing these tiny materials can prevent an asthma attack. You can find HEPA filters in air purifiers and vacuum cleaners.

Histamine: A chemical that a child's body releases when having an allergic reaction to allergens such as pollen, mold, and dust mites. It causes their nose to get red, swell, itch, and make more mucus.

Hives: A type of itchy rash. It looks like raised white lumps on red, swollen skin.

Immunotherapy (Allergy Shots): Regular shots of a small amount of the allergen a child is allergic to. Over time, they get more and more of the allergen in their shot so that their body gets less allergic to it.

Inflammation (Inflammatory Response): The swelling that's always in a child's lungs when they have asthma. This swelling can build up and block their airways, making it hard for them to breathe. Asthma triggers usually make inflammation worse.

Inhalation: Breathing in.

Metered Dose Inhaler (MDI), Puffer or Pump: A small device used to get controller medicine or quick-relief medicine into a child's lungs. When pressed down from the top, it releases a mist of medicine that is breathed in. Many asthma medicines are taken with a metered dose inhaler (MDI).

Irritants: Things that bother a child's nose, throat, or airways when they breathe them in. Irritants can cause an asthma attack or allergy symptoms, but they aren't the same as allergens. Examples are tobacco smoke, chemical fumes, bug sprays, and air pollution.

Leukotriene Modifier: A medicine that blocks chemicals called leukotrienes that tighten the airway muscles and cause the body to make more mucus and fluid.

Lungs: Balloon-like chest organs used for breathing. There's a left lung and a right lung.

Medical History: A list of a child's past health problems, current symptoms, medicines, and health risk factors.

Mold: A growth found in damp, wet places. Parts of it float in the air and can be breathed in to cause an asthma attack. It's common in basements and bathrooms, as well as outdoors in grass, leaf piles, hay, mulch, or under mushrooms.

Mucus: A thick, sticky liquid that coats and protects the nose, sinuses, mouth, throat, airways, and lungs. Asthma triggers can cause the body to make too much mucus. Having too much mucus can make it very hard to breathe.

Nebulizer Machine: A small machine that turns liquid medicine into a mist so it's easy to breathe in. Children usually use it with a face mask or a mouthpiece to make sure the medicine gets into their lungs.

Peak Flow Meter: A small, handheld tool that shows how open a child's airways are by testing how much air they blow out of their lungs. It helps you know if asthma symptoms are getting worse.

Pneumonia: A severe lung infection that can be fatal. It can be caused by bacteria or a virus and can happen in one or both lungs.

Pollen: A powder released into the air by certain plants. It's a common allergen and asthma trigger.

Productive Cough: A “wet” cough that may bring up mucus.

Pulmonary Function Tests (PFT): One or more tests to check how much and how fast air moves out of a child's lungs.

Pulse Oximetry: A test that checks how much oxygen is in the blood. To do this test, a nurse will clip a small tool onto a finger for less than a minute.

Recurrent: Something that keeps happening. For example, recurrent asthma symptoms are asthma symptoms that keep happening.

Respiration: Breathing.

Respiratory System: The group of organs that carries oxygen from the air to the bloodstream and gets rid of carbon dioxide.

Respiratory Infection: An illness that affects airways and causes asthma-like symptoms. Children with asthma may have more asthma symptoms for a while after getting a respiratory infection.

Sensitivity or Sensitization: Describes how the body responds to an allergen. For some people, the more they're around an allergen, the more likely they are to get sensitive to it and have an allergic reaction.

Shortness of Breath: Trouble breathing. A child can't take in or let out enough air.

Sinuses: Natural air pockets within the bones of the head. They're protected by a lining that makes mucus.

Sinusitis: An infection of the sinuses that makes the lining of the sinuses swell. It can happen when something blocks how air flows into the sinuses and how mucus drains out. Common symptoms are headache, a tender or painful face, fever, a stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, and cough.

Spacer (Holding Chamber): A plastic tube or chamber that goes on an inhaler. It helps make sure the sprayed medicine gets into the lungs.

Trachea (Windpipe): The main airway that carries air into and out of the lungs.

Triggers: Anything that can cause an asthma attack or make asthma worse. Common asthma triggers are listed in section 1 on page 4.

Upper Respiratory Infection: An infection in the nose, sinuses, throat, trachea, or airways.

Virus: A germ that can cause an infection in the airways, such as pneumonia. Antibiotics can't treat viral infections.

Wheezing: A high-pitched whistling sound a child makes when breathing out and sometimes breathing in. It happens when the airways are tightened. Wheezing is a classic sign of asthma.