

School Health Update

Spring 2009

Asthma

Helping Kids With Asthma

Asthma is one of the most common chronic health issues facing school children today. As a school nurse, you may find yourself in a position to help children prevent and manage their asthmatic symptoms. To help you assist your students, Missouri Care would like to offer the following information about asthma in school settings.

What Schools Can Do

Create a partnership with your administration and with the other staff to help your students with asthma. Begin by following these 10 tips:

- Assess and improve the air quality in your school by utilizing the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Kit, which may be accessed at: www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/toolkit.html
- Control animal allergens – remove classroom animals, if possible; if not, move animals away from asthmatic students and from ventilation systems
- Control cockroach allergens – use integrated pest management practices to prevent pest problems; store food in tightly sealed containers; place dumpsters away from the building
- Clean up mold and control moisture – fix moisture problems and dry wet areas within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth
- Eliminate secondhand smoke exposure – enforce no-smoking policies in the school
- Reduce dust mite exposure – make sure the school is dusted and vacuumed thoroughly and regularly

Sources

- 1 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Indoor Air – IAQ Tools for Schools. www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/asthma/10ways.htm
- 2 American Academy of Pediatrics School Health website: www.aap.org/schooledinasthma/tools.htm

- Develop an asthma management plan in your school – include school policies on inhaler and other medication usage
- Provide school-based asthma education programs – see “Additional Tools for Schools” section
- Create and file student Asthma Action Plans – see “Asthma Action Plan” section
- Gather additional asthma information and resources

Asthma Action Plan

Every student with asthma should have an asthma action plan on file with the school nurse. At a minimum, the student’s individual action plan should include:

- The name and dose of medications taken
- When and how the medications are taken, including which medications the child can take on his or her own and which require assistance
- Possible side effects of the medications
- Specific allergies, and their symptoms
- When to take a peak flow measurement
- What situations signal a potential emergency
- What to do in case of an emergency
- Parent and Primary Care Provider (PCP) contact information

Additional Tools for Schools

- Missouri statute on self-administered medications in the schools www.moga.mo.gov/statutes/c100-199/1670000627.htm
- American Academy of Pediatrics School Health website – Asthma Action plans www.aap.org/schooledinasthma/tools.htm

Dealing with Somatic Complaints

As a school nurse, you undoubtedly see numerous children who present with vague or minor ailments that can’t be easily verified or discounted. While occasionally these symptoms can be associated with significant medical problems, sometimes they are better recognized as somatic complaints. For some children, a report of a headache, stomach pain, or vague or general discomfort is a more acceptable

way to communicate unease than reporting (or even recognizing) fear or anxiety or a need for some comfort. Because some children lack other coping skills when facing stressful situations, a trip to the school nurse can become an easy way to escape that stress. In fact, somatic complaints are a classic example of a behavior made more likely to reoccur due to “negative reinforcement,” as being allowed to leave the stressful situation when you voice a complaint increases the chance that you will use that strategy again later. These problems usually decrease as children naturally become more comfortable with the school

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environment and as they learn other ways to solve social problems. You might want to try some cognitive-behavioral techniques with those children who seem to be particularly prone to these types of complaints.

- Provide some validation for the emotional distress. Let the child know that you understand that sometimes our bodies start to feel "funny" or a little bad when we get scared or we don't know what to do. Reassure them that, as they get more used to their classroom or the other children, they probably won't always have that reaction.
- Train alternative coping skills. Talk about ways other children you have known have handled social problems in the past, like talking about their feelings or finding a friend for some support.
- Limit reinforcement for physical complaints and focus on praising the child when they have been able to cope without these complaints. Help the child develop a more positive attitude (what therapists call a positive "anticipatory set") toward school activities or peers who tend to trigger the somatic complaints.
- Practice some role playing or help the child think up some other ways they could handle the situation, and make sure they are given some encouragement for these new behaviors.
- Refer to school counselor if the child's anxiety appears chronic or begins to have a serious impact on their functioning. If you think additional therapy might be useful, please refer the parents to the behavioral health department at 1-800-322-6027, option 7 for contact information for in-network providers.

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Sports Physicals vs. EPSDT Exams

Each school year, many students visit their Primary Care Provider's (PCP's) office to obtain a sports physical, which allows them to participate in school-sponsored sports teams. Although passing a sports physical indicates that a child is healthy enough to play sports, it does not constitute the complete physical, social, and mental health assessment that children need regularly. Missouri Care recommends that children have a complete HCY (Healthy Children and Youth) screening – also known as an EPSDT (Early, Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment) checkup – every year.

During an EPSDT checkup, a PCP assesses a child's physical, mental, and social development. The PCP often asks the child

about his or her home and social environment, hobbies, interests, and concerns. The PCP checks that immunizations are up-to-date and orders any lab work that is needed. An important component of the EPSDT checkup is the health education the PCP provides to the child and the child's parents.

Having a child's PCP perform a complete EPSDT checkup is an easy way to fulfill the requirements to play sports and keep the child healthy. Encourage your student's parents to ask their PCP for a complete EPSDT when a sports physical is needed. For more information about EPSDT checkups, call Missouri Care's quality coordinator at 1-800-322-6027. You can also visit the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services at www.cms.hhs.gov/MedicaidEarlyPeriodicScr

Immunizations

How Nurses and Parents Can Work Together to Ensure a Healthy New Year



Help your students stay healthy! Now is a good time to remind your students' parents that the state of Missouri requires that all school children be up-to-date on their immunizations. To help you advise

parents of this important information, we have included the following links:

CDC National Immunization Program Website

www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule.htm

- Provides the 2009 immunization schedule and catch-up schedule for children and adolescents
- Provides up-to-date information about common childhood diseases and questions parents might ask about vaccinations
- Allows parents to print a customized immunization schedule based on their child's date of birth

State of Missouri Immunization Schedule and Records Website

www.dhss.mo.gov/immunizations/Records

- Provides a link to Missouri's immunization requirements for school attendance
- Provides a sample letter to parents of children who are behind on their immunizations
- Allows parents to print a blank immunization record that they can use to keep track of their child's immunizations

Include Fiber in Your Diet

The typical American does not get enough fiber in their diet. Taking in an average of 10-15 grams of fiber per day is far short of the daily needs. The current recommendation for adults is 20 to 35 grams. Children over age 2 should consume an amount equal to their age plus 5 grams a day.



What is fiber?

Fiber is made up of complex

carbohydrates or plants foods that cannot be digested in the body, and therefore passes through the entire gastrointestinal track intact. There are two types of fiber:

Soluble fiber

- Helps delay the emptying of the stomach, which delays the absorption of sugar and controls hunger.
- Lowers cholesterol by attaching to fatty substances in the body and carry waste out of the body.
- Soluble fiber can be found in dried beans, peas, lentils, oats, barley, apples, bananas, citrus fruits, berries, pears, and carrots.

Insoluble Fiber

- These fibers do not bind to water, cholesterol, or fluids.
- Helps with the passage of food through the body, promoting regularity.
- Insoluble fiber can be found in cauliflower, green beans, potatoes, broccoli, asparagus, zucchini, cucumbers, skin of tomatoes, corn, brown rice, and whole-wheat products.

There is no doubt that fiber is an important component of your daily diet.

PT/OT/ST- IEP/IFSP

PT, OT, ST services provided by the public school system in an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) are not the responsibility of Missouri Care. Missouri Care requires Primary Care Providers to see members for EPSDT/HCY services at established intervals based on the child's age prior to extension of authorization for PT, OT, ST services by therapy providers. Missouri Care will be reviewing requests for authorization of extended PT, OT and ST services from therapy providers to ensure members are referred back to their PCP for EPSDT/HCY services.