

For Immediate Release

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Back to school with asthma Tips to prevent asthma medication poisonings.

Nearly 6% of Washington State's school children have asthma, the chronic disease that affects the airway making breathing difficult. As these students head back to school, they are likely to be packing the medication needed to help manage their asthma.

Asthma medications are generally used more this time of the year because, as studies show, asthma attacks peak shortly after the school year begins. According to the American Lung Association of Washington's (ALAW) 2005 Burden of Asthma Report, 20% of kids with asthma missed 5 or more days of school in 2004 due to their condition.

"The best way to keep a child with asthma healthy, in school and ready to learn is to work together with the child's healthcare provider and the school," said Paul Payton, Director of Communications for the ALAW. "Even young children can learn to control their own asthma by avoiding their triggers, recognizing their signs and symptoms, and taking their medicine appropriately."

Living with asthma may mean needing access to medication. Asthma medicines keep the air tubes in the lungs open. They are sold under many names and come in different forms. All asthma medication should be treated just like any other medicine. Taken in the wrong amount or by the wrong person can lead to serious concerns, such as increased heart rate, shakiness, increased blood pressure, anxiety, insomnia and seizures.

During the last school year, the Washington Poison Center (WAPC) received 167 calls about school age children that may have been poisoned by asthma medications. This includes the students who were prescribed the medication, as well as the students that came in contact with the medicine but it was not prescribed for them. Twenty-three percent of those cases happened in the first two months of school.

Almost all of the students were exposed to the asthma medication at home, not at school. "Children are getting exposed to asthma medication in the same way as other medicines," stated Dr. Bill Hurley, Medical Director of the WAPC. "These exposures are usually unintentional and are often caused by a child accidentally taking a sibling's medicine, or taking the medicine without parental supervision."

Children are also poisoned by their medication when a 'therapeutic mistake' occurs when both parents and/or caregivers medicate the child with the right dose not knowing it was already given. Most of the time, the problem is minimal, with a mild increase in activity and heart rate. "More serious problems arise when a child takes multiple doses over a very short time, often during a flair-up of asthma," stated Hurley. "When an asthma attack is not made better by the usual dose of medication, the child should be seen by a health care provider."

Together, the WAPC and the ALAW urge families and school personnel to work together to help reduce errors. They advise the following to prevent an asthma medication emergency both at home and in the schools:

- Give school personnel and after school caregivers an Asthma Action Plan completed by your child's medical provider with detailed instructions and information on your child's medication;
- When giving asthma medicine, never give more than the prescribed amount in the Asthma Action Plan;
- Teach children the right way to use an inhaler, and if the child is old enough, explain the dangers of abuse and misuse;
- Advise children not to share his/her medication, even if the other child has asthma as well;
- Keep medication in its original container;
- Store all medication out of the sight and reach of younger children;
- As a result of a recent state law, children can self-carry asthma medication if they have consent from their medical provider and parents;
- Alert school personnel to the triggers of your child's asthma attack.

If safety measures are taken, children with asthma may not be in danger or ill from medication mishaps. It is very important to have good communication with your child, school personnel and after school caregivers about the specific asthma therapy your child needs. A free Asthma Action Plan form is available at www.alaw.org or by calling 1-800-LUNG-USA.

If an asthma medication is taken in the wrong dose or by the wrong person, call the Washington Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. If the person is having difficulty breathing or a clear medical emergency, call 911. If you have questions or concerns about medications used to treat asthma or for fee Mr. Yuk stickers, please call the Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

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The Washington Poison Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization, prevents harm from poisoning through expertise, collaboration and professional and public education. Reachable 24/7, the national poison hotline, **1-800-222-1222**, will connect you to specially-trained pharmacists, nurses and poison specialists. Poison help is always free and confidential. Services are available for people with hearing problems and for non-English speakers.
www.wapc.org



Beginning our second century, the American Lung Association of Washington is the leading organization working to prevent lung disease and promote lung health. Lung disease death rates continue to increase while other leading causes of death have declined. The ALAW funds vital research on the causes of and treatments for lung disease. With the generous support of the public, the American Lung Association is "Improving life, one breath at a time." For more information about the ALAW or to support the work it does, call 1-800-732-9339 or log on to www.alaw.org.