All About Asthma
What is Asthma?

The airways are always swollen and inflamed.

The swelling and inflammation cause the body to release histamines that contribute to the production of mucous that can block the airways.

The airways are extra sensitive to things you may breathe and can trigger an asthma attack.

The inflammation makes it difficult to move air through the airways.

The constant inflammation causes a cycle of continuous difficulty in breathing and can lead to worsening symptoms.
**What is Asthma?**

- During an asthma attack the airways get smaller from the muscles squeezing them closed.
- The most common cause of an asthma attack is an infection in the lungs.
- Asthma does not go away, it can only be controlled with medications your provider prescribes.
- An asthma attack can come on rapidly and can be life-threatening.
- If the inflammation is not treated it can permanently damage the airways.

**What are the symptoms of Asthma?**

- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing (particularly at night or in the morning)
- Tight chest
- Waking up at night from cough or difficulty breathing
- Difficulty breathing during sports or other physical activities

**Other symptoms that could indicate your child is having trouble breathing:**

- Difficulty feeding
- Grunting sounds
- Poor sucking
- Crabby or tired more than usual
- Not eating as much

**Symptoms can be present**

- Continuously
- During certain seasons
- Only when you exercise
- Intermittently
- Immediately when exposed to “triggers”

**When symptoms occur you must follow the Asthma Action Plan that was designed for you.**
What are Triggers?

Triggers are things that you are exposed to that may cause an asthma attack or make your symptoms worse.

Please check off any of the following conditions listed below that you suspect may be triggering you or your child’s asthma:

- Animal Dander
- Cold Air
- Hairspray
- Dust Mites
- Mold
- Air Pollution
- Woodburning stoves/fireplaces
- Tobacco smoke
- Cleaning products
- Flu or Cold symptoms
- Cockroaches
- Certain Foods
- Strong smells
- Pollen
- Other _______________________

Once triggers are identified, careful attention to your surroundings should be considered. This includes removing triggers from the daycare, bedroom or any other place you spend a lot of time. This will help reduce the chances of an asthma attack.

If you have asthma and you smoke, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for assistance and resources to help you quit. By quitting smoking now, you will help improve your asthma symptoms.

Where can Triggers be hiding?

Viral Illness is the most common cause of an asthma attack, especially in children.

**What to do:**
- Avoid exposure to other friends and family members when they are sick.
- Always practice good handwashing to stop the spreading of bacteria.

Pets or anything with fur or feathers like birds, dogs, cats, horses, cows, etc.

**What to do:**
- Do not allow animals to sleep on furniture, especially sleep areas.

Linens, feathered pillows or comforters can hold dust, dust mites, perfumes, colognes and tobacco smoke particles which cling to the fabric and cause an attack.

**What to do:**
- Wash linens in hot water weekly.
Where can Triggers be hiding?

**Mattresses** can hold millions of dust mites that are kept alive by dark, warm and humid environments.

**What to do:**
- Remove stuffed animals from beds as they are “dust bunnies.”
- Consider hypoallergenic mattress and pillow covers and discontinue use of humidifiers.

**Molds** can be under sinks, in the bathtub or shower and in basements. Carpets laid over concrete create the most moisture and can lead to mold growing in between.

**What to do:**
- Molding and counter tops should be cleaned with a 10% bleach solution regularly.
- Outdoor molds can be controlled by improving water drainage around the house and not allowing piles of leaves or brush to accumulate.

**Flooring** can hold dust and irritants embedded in carpet fibers, rugs, etc.

**What to do:**
- Vacuum frequently (at least weekly)
- Sweep/mop frequently (at least weekly)
- Consider replacing carpet areas with hardwood or laminate flooring

**School and Workplaces** have all the same things as the home plus paint fumes, varnish, adhesives, latex, chalk dust, insecticides, leaky roofs, wet carpets and poor ventilation.

**Air Pollution** is highest when you can “see the air.”

**What to do:**
- Limit outdoor activities when fields are burning or crops are being cut.
- Indoor air pollution can be improved by using hepa-filters and non-ionizing filters.
- Cover heater vents with filters in room and change the heater filters regularly.
- Vacuum carpets once or twice a week.
- Discontinue the use of humidifiers, consider the use of a dehumidifier to keep humidity less than 50% and use an air conditioner instead of open windows.

**Other Considerations** that may trigger an asthma attack include:
- stress
- crying
- laughing
- yelling
- exercise
- aspirin
- shrimp
- processed potatoes
Asthma Action Plans

An Asthma Action Plan will be given to you prior to discharge from the hospital. It has Green, Yellow and Red Zones that indicate what to do when symptoms occur. Please follow the action plan as prescribed by your provider.

### Long-Term Control Medicines

Use every day to stay healthy!

These medications keep inflammation under control and help to prevent an asthma attack. They will not reverse an attack - they are only for reducing the inflammation. Controller medications take time to start working so please **DO NOT** stop taking them without consulting your physician.

- Rinse your mouth out after use
- Refill your prescription before it runs out

### Quick Relief Medications

Use when you are having trouble breathing & to get relief during an attack

These medicines work instantly to relax the muscles that are squeezing the airways. Follow the recommendations of your Asthma Action Plan and keep track of how often you are using quick relief medications. If you are using them more than twice a week you should contact your primary care physician to discuss changing your medication.

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### My Asthma Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider’s Name:</th>
<th>Provider’s Phone #:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try to Avoid these Triggers:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Flu or Colds</td>
<td>☐ Tobacco Smoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Fragrances</td>
<td>☐ Air Pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Pollen</td>
<td>☐ Wood Burning Stoves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Trees/Grass</td>
<td>☐ Dust Mites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other:</td>
<td>☐ Certain Food(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Zone: I Feel Good</td>
<td>Take Your Long-Term Control Medicines Every Day to stay healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(My Peak Flow is in the GREEN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ No Cough, No Wheeze</td>
<td>How much to take (dose):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ No Shortness of breath</td>
<td>How often:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can do usual Activities</td>
<td>☐ times per day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Yellow Zone: I do Not Feel good |
| (My Peak Flow is in the YELLOW) |
| Symptoms: May include one or more |
| ☐ Tight Chest | How much to take (dose): |
| ☐ Wheezing | ☐ times per day |
| ☐ Cough | ☐ times per day |
| ☐ Shortness of breath | ☐ As needed |
| ☐ Difficult when doing usual activities | If your symptoms and peak flow do not return to Green Zone within one hour, you may repeat the Quick Relief medicine above. |
| ☐ Waking up at night with difficulty breathing Peak Flow: , or less than 80% of my best |

**Contact your physician if no relief is achieved after medicines are taken.**

| Red Zone: I Feel Awful |
| (My Peak Flow is in the RED) |
| Symptoms: |
| ☐ It’s getting harder and harder to breathe | Medicine & Route: |
| ☐ Unable to sleep or do usual activities | How much to take (dose): |

**DANGER! Get Help Immediately!**

Call 9-1-1 if you have trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath and/or lips or fingernails are grey or blue.

Contact your Provider within One Week for a Follow-Up Appointment or on:  ____  ____  ____

Patient/Caregiver Signature: _________________________ Form Completed by: _________________________

HCP Signature: _________________________
Peak Flows

A Peak Flow Meter is a useful tool to use at home to monitor how well your lungs are working. When you are feeling your best, you should blow through your peak flow and record the highest number you can blow to. This number will be considered “Your Personal Best” and when your peak flow numbers are going down, you will need to follow the instructions on your Asthma Action Plan.

Daily peak flow recording is recommended to help recognize the beginning of a worsening lung condition. Please check your peak flows at the same time each day and if possible, check in the morning and evening. You should take the Peak Flow diary to your provider to help them provide the best care possible.

Your best Peak Flow ever! You feel great! Keep taking your controller medications!

You do not feel good and may be having asthma symptoms. Follow your Asthma Action Plan!

GET HELP IMMEDIATELY! Call 9-1-1 if you have trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath.
How to Take Your Medications

1. Shake the inhaler before each puff.
2. Always use your inhaler with the spacer that was given to you at the hospital.
3. Put the mouthpiece of the spacer into your mouth; making sure your lips are sealed tightly around the mouthpiece. If you are using a spacer with a mask, be sure the mask fits snugly over the mouth and nose.
4. Stand up straight and breathe out.
5. Start to slowly breathe in, then press down on the metal can to release one (1) puff of the medicine.
6. Be sure you breathe in slowly and deeply.
7. If able, hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds
8. Repeat steps 5-7 for additional puffs after 3-5 minutes.
9. When finished, rinse your mouth and spit, or drink a sip of water.
10. Be sure to clean your spacer each month with a mild soap and water or when very cloudy.

Don’t run out of your medications! It is hard to tell when the inhaler is empty. If you are used to the taste of the medicine, you may notice the taste is gone when the inhaler is empty.

Using a Nebulizer to take medications

When you use a nebulizer, you breathe a fine mist of medication that is broken into little particles. The medication is inhaled through a mask or a mouthpiece. It should not be administered by blowing the medication into the face with a tube.

Make sure the company that supplies you with the machine shows you how to use it and services it regularly.

Be sure to rinse your nebulizer with warm water after each use and allow to dry completely before using again. Each week you should clean your nebulizer with a one part vinegar and three parts water (i.e. 1/4 cup vinegar to 3/4 cup water) solution. Replace with a new nebulizer each month. After cleaning, rinse with water and allow to dry.
The Montana Asthma Program (MAP) provides free services to help children and their families learn how to better manage asthma in their daily lives. Call us for more information at 406-751-8110.

**Eligibility:**
- Reside (live) in Flathead County
- Age 17 or younger
- Have had at least one hospitalization, Emergency Room or Urgent Care visit in the last 12 months.

**MAP Provides**
- Six home visits over the course of a year with a Registered Nurse.
- Education about asthma and proper use of asthma medications.
- Home assessment for environmental triggers and allergens and ways to reduce them.
- Asthma friendly mattress and pillow covers for the child’s bed.
- HEPA grade air filter, if needed.