

Back-to-School Means Beware of Asthma for Some

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Asthma is a leading cause of death and disability in children younger than 18 years old, and is one of the leading causes of hospitalization in school-age children. Since children spend up to 30 percent of their day in school, a University of Missouri respiratory therapy expert says it is imperative that every school employee, from teachers to bus drivers, understand the condition and how to treat it.

“It’s not just teachers and school nurses who need to be able to deal with asthma,” said Shawna Strickland, clinical assistant professor of respiratory therapy in the School of Health Professions. “The office staff, bus drivers and janitors also need to be informed. Sometimes, especially in rural areas, there is only one nurse who covers several schools. It’s up to teachers and others to recognize impending symptoms and take appropriate actions.”

As students go back to school, there could be plenty of asthma triggers waiting for them, Strickland said. Buildings without air conditioning often have open windows that create more problematic dust. Dry eraser markers and chalk dust also release odor and particles. Textbooks that are old and musty can create problems and, in some schools, mold is an issue. Classrooms with pets such as gerbils can cause allergic reactions in some children.

Strickland stresses the importance of having an asthma action plan. The plan should include contact information for the child’s doctor and a list of medications, such as inhalers or spacers, and how to use them

properly. School employees should be trained to recognize signs and symptoms of an impending asthma attack.

“When we think of asthma, we often think of severe wheezing and shortness of breath,” Strickland said. “However, for many kids, a full-blown attack can be preceded by a persistent cough, complaints of not feeling well and not behaving properly, instead of the classic signs.”

Strickland said that approximately two out of 30 students in a class will have asthma. Asthma is the cause of 14.7 million lost school days in children ages five to 18 and affects more than 5 million children.

Provided by University of Missouri

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