



Welcoming Girls with Asthma into Your Troop

Asthma is a respiratory condition marked by spasms in the bronchial tubes of the lungs, causing difficulty in breathing. It usually results from an allergic reaction or other forms of hypersensitivity. It is one of the most common long-term diseases of children. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 9% of children in the United States have it, and the numbers are increasing.

An “asthma attack” is a sudden worsening of asthma symptoms caused by the tightening of muscles around the airways (bronchospasm). During the asthma attack, the lining of the airways also becomes swollen or inflamed and more mucus than usual is produced which inhibits typical breathing patterns and oxygen intake. Asthma attacks can be frightening for the asthmatic person and the people around them. The important thing is to remember to stay calm and keep others calm while taking steps to first, treat the symptoms of the attack, and secondly, eliminate the triggers that caused the attack if possible. Symptoms of an asthma attack or general lack of oxygen can include: wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest, inability to take deep breaths, breathlessness, and blue tint to the lips or finger/toenails.

Asthma can be triggered by many things such as allergens or environmental factors and activities. Everyone’s specific triggers and allergens are unique. Examples of things that can trigger asthma attacks are: strong scents (ex. perfume, scented bodily hygiene products, candles, air fresheners, industrial cleaners), smoke (ex. camp fires, BBQ or grilling, candles, cigarettes), food allergens (many food allergies can result in asthmatic reactions), mold presence, changes in air pressure (thunderstorms), physical activity, presence of dust mites (ex. dusty surfaces or objects), environmental allergens (ex. grasses, weeds, trees, pollens, and wind), and the presence of animals (specifically animal hair, fur, and dandruff).

Asthma is treated in many ways. People with asthma may regulate their symptoms with allergy or asthma medications that are taken orally, and/or with inhaled medications, delivered by nebulizers (which are small machines that provide inhaled medication treatments), or by “rescue inhalers” (which are hand-held inhalers used in the event of an asthma emergency. If they have a food or environmental allergy which results in a sudden and dangerous asthmatic reaction/attack, they may also have an EpiPen to treat symptoms.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with Asthma in your troop:

1. Consult with the girl’s parent/guardian beforehand about any medication or medical equipment that may be present with the girl or adult during meetings (there may be an “Asthma Action Plan” to consult). Be clear about how and when to administer the medication or treatment, and make sure it’s being stored in a safe location away from general accessibility of the girls, but easy to get to in an emergency
2. Consult with the girl’s parent/guardian about potential asthmatic triggers and how to avoid them
3. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner. This will promote better understanding and allow everyone to work together as a troop to ensure that everyone’s needs are met
4. Always consult with the parent/guardian beforehand to be sure you’re providing for the girl’s needs to the best of your ability—they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child

For more help and information visit Center for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/faqs.htm>

For more help and information regarding food allergies and asthma visit Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America <http://www.aafa.org/page/allergic-asthma.aspx>

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact GSEP via email at memberservices@gsep.org or via phone at 215-564-2030

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor’s instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSEP volunteers to use while welcoming girls with special needs to their troops and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian’s instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel.