



What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (ongoing) illness affecting the lungs. Children with asthma have airways that swell and are overly sensitive.

What causes asthma?

We don't know what causes asthma, but it runs in families.

Is there a cure for asthma?

No. Asthma cannot be cured, but the symptoms can usually be controlled.

What is an asthma flare-up?

When exposed to an asthma trigger (such as cold viruses, animals, mold or cold weather), an asthma flare-up can happen. During a flare-up:

- **Airways become more swollen** and **produce sticky mucus.**
- The **muscles around the airways become tight** (called a bronchospasm).
- Swelling, mucus and tightness in the airways of the lungs make it **hard to breathe** because air cannot get through.

The picture below shows what a normal airway looks like as compared to an airway of a person with asthma.



What are the signs and symptoms of an asthma flare-up?

Signs and symptoms of an asthma flare-up may include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, or shortness of breath.

What are the early signs of an asthma flare-up?

Early signs of an asthma flare-up are:

- Cold symptoms
- Feeling tired
- Trouble sleeping
- Low energy for play or exercise
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Chin or throat itchiness

What are the serious signs of an asthma flare-up?

Severe signs of an asthma flare-up are:

- Severe coughing, shortness of breath or chest tightness
- Breathing hard and fast
- Nostrils flaring
- Pulling in the neck, chest or stomach muscles
- Difficulty talking
- Hunched shoulders
- Lips or fingernails turn gray or blue

If you have any of these signs, get help from a doctor right away, or call 911.

What can I do to control my child's asthma?

- Take all medicines as prescribed by your doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Follow your Asthma Action Plan.
- Keep all of your follow-up visits with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

This Family Education Sheet is available in [Arabic](#), [Simplified Chinese \(China PRC, Singapore, Malaysia\)](#), [Traditional Chinese \(Hong Kong and Taiwan\)](#), [Haitian Creole](#), [Portuguese](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).