



### 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](#).*