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**Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 14, Issue 7, #2 July 2007**

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**IF YOUR CHILD HAS ASTHMA OR ALLERGIES, PREPARE FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR NOW**

\* In less than a month, a new school year begins. New school-year jitters are common for every child no matter the age. The thought of new teachers, perhaps a new school itself, making new friends, seeing old friends, the end of less structured days can cause excitement for most kids, glee for some, trepidation for others and down-right panic for a few. It's always a challenge for both parents and kids to face a new school year if your child has asthma and allergies, but it doesn't have to be a fearful or unpleasant experience if you **take a few steps to prepare**.

\* Whether your child is in pre-school or high school, if they have asthma and allergies, one of the first steps is to **make a doctor's appointment before school begins** to assess your child's asthma control. Ask us for a free copy of an asthma control plan to take to your physician. Your doctor can list the current medication plan for your child while they assess asthma control. It may be necessary to change medications or dosages.

\* Next step, **fill any new prescriptions**. Check to see all inhalers are full; get an extra peak flow meter to keep at school; mark all medications and devices with your child's name using labels. Texas law allows kids with asthma to carry and self-administer prescription asthma medicine on school property or at a school-related event **if the student has written permission from the student's parent and physician** or licensed health care provider. Parents and nurses: **ask AAFA-TX for a free permission form**.

\* Next step, **make an appointment with your child's new teacher**. Bring a signed copy of your new action plan and permission form to the teacher. Here's a tip: these forms are generally kept in the nurse's office; attach a small photo of your child to each form. Ask your child if they want to attend this meeting: it may empower them as part of the process.

\* Discuss your child's asthma or allergies with their teacher. **Clarify what the teacher knows about asthma and allergies**; discuss your child's triggers; if you feel your child is too young to handle their own meds at school, ask where medications will be kept – and how the child accesses them; develop an emergency plan: make sure the teacher knows how to use asthma devices; discuss how exercise and emotions effect the disease and perhaps your child's actions.

\* Ask the teacher 1) about make-up plans for absenteeism 2) if any other children in the class have asthma or allergies (this might help your child feel less singled out) 3) AAFA-TX is a resource; recommend teachers, nurses and staff contact us to learn more about these diseases, check our website ( [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org) ) or attend one of our programs.

\* **Does your child have any allergies that might be life-threatening?** If the child is at risk for anaphylaxis ask your physician for epinephrine auto-injectors, one to send to school, one to keep at home. Most physicians recommend having access to two injections of epinephrine, like a Twinject device or 2 Epipens since anaphylaxis could cause a second, more severe reaction minutes or even hours after the initial anaphylactic reaction. Texas law allows a child to carry their own epinephrine devices to school or at school sponsored activities with a permission form signed by both parents and physician or licensed health care provider. Ask us for a free permission form.

\* Discuss these allergies with teachers and school staff. Are teachers and staff aware of the **symptoms of food allergy?** **Mild symptoms can include:** some itching in nose and throat; general skin itchiness; nausea; runny nose; runny and itchy eyes; earache; hives; diarrhea; rash. For some, even the scent of a food allergen or touching a hand or surface that touched their food allergen could cause anaphylactic shock. **Ask what steps** are taken at school to **prevent cross-contamination** of food allergens.

\* **Dangerous allergy symptoms can include:** severe swelling of mouth, throat and sometimes the whole face; severe airway swelling; restricted breathing; chest tightness or wheezing; fainting; recurrent earache; vomiting; recurring diarrhea; onset of anaphylactic shock - this is an emergency! Seek medical help.

\* **Children, especially little ones, won't or can't verbally express all their symptoms for a severe allergic reaction.** Supervising adults have to learn body language and "child-speak" and then act quickly to save a life. The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) has assembled some "signals" of a child in allergy distress: **1)** Very young children MIGHT put their hands into their mouths, or pull or scratch at their tongues when experiencing an allergic reaction **2)** Sometimes a child's voice might change, getting squeaky or hoarse, even slurring their words because the tongue is swelling **3)** A child old enough to verbalize might say something as innocent as "this food is too spicy" **4)** Other things they may say is that their tongue (or mouth) feels hot, or even burning, or something is poking their tongue or its tingling or itches or feels like it has hair on it, feels funny, heavy, or full **5)** Other phrases a child might use is that it feels like there's a frog in their throat, or something is stuck in their throat **6)** A child could say his lips feel tight, or his throat feels thick, or they have a bump or lump on the back of the tongue or in their throat **7)** Sometimes a child will start scratching or pulling at their ears and say it feels like there are bugs in their ears. **If they see any of these signs** after a child is exposed to their allergic trigger, teachers must **follow emergency procedures**. Ask AAFA-TX for a free copy of an anaphylaxis emergency action plan. There may be no time to call the nurse; teachers have to know how to proceed with this emergency.

**Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs** **1) Tues. Aug. 14, 8 am-11 am "Asthma Management & Education"**, a CEU program for nurses worth 3 CEU, Houston. Register online with Houston ISD. **Contact AAFA-TX for info.** **2) Wed. Aug. 15, Asthma Education for Ector ISD school nurses, Odessa.** Contact Laura Mathew, 432-368-2837, for more info.

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