



NEWS RELEASE

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Alabama celebrates asthma awareness month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In the United States alone, more than 6 million children suffer from asthma, which is the most common serious chronic disease of childhood. In addition, asthma accounts for one-third of all pediatric emergency room visits, and is a leading cause of school absenteeism in Alabama.

In response to these alarming statistics, and in an effort to raise public awareness of the risks faced every day by 22 million Americans living with asthma, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management are joining the Environmental Protection Agency to participate in Asthma Awareness Month and World Asthma Day.

Asthma is on the rise in Alabama, as well as in the nation. Asthma is increasing among males and females, in all age groups, and among all races. African Americans face greater risks from asthma; they are more likely to be hospitalized for asthma and one-quarter of people who die from asthma are African American.

Data from the 2005 Alabama Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Survey show that 7.1 percent of adults have been told by a health care provider that they currently have asthma. The 2005 Youth Risk Surveillance Survey reports that 17.3 percent of youth in grades 9-12 have asthma.

Asthma attacks or episodes are usually started by some type of exposure to “triggers.” These triggers cause the airways or bronchial tubes to become inflamed. This causes a narrowing of the airways. Once narrowed or “constricted” then airflow is diminished and immediate action must be taken.

Risk factors for developing asthma are genetics, environmental exposure from irritating substances (chemical or biological) and other contributing factors such as allergies.

Asthma symptoms include cough, wheezing, shortness of breath or an increase in work of breath, chest tightness, and rapid breathing. Once these signs start appearing, the patient should immediately start measures to open up the bronchial tubes.

Triggers are the irritants in the environment that cause bronchial constriction or provoke an attack. Triggers do not cause asthma. However, they can induce an attack or episode. Triggers are usually specific to the individual and may vary from one person to the next. Examples of triggers include, but are not limited to smoking, dust mites, pets, cockroaches, mold, pollen,

exercise, cold air, colds and infections, extreme changes in weather, strong fumes, emotional events and food.

Treatment includes the following measures:

- * Reduce exposure to house dust mites: Wash bed linens weekly, avoid down fillings in pillows and comforters, limit stuffed animals to those that can be washed, use bedding encasements, and reduce house humidity level.
- * Reduce exposure to environmental tobacco smoke: No smoking. Evidence shows a direct relationship between tobacco smoke exposure and asthma episodes.
- * Reduce exposure to cockroaches: Remove as many water and food sources as possible to avoid cockroaches.
- * Reduce exposure to pets: People who are allergic to pets should not have them in the house. At a minimum, do not allow pets in the bedroom.
- * Reduce exposure to mold: Eliminating mold may help control asthma exacerbation.

For more information on EPA's Asthma Program and Asthma Awareness Month, log on to www.epa.gov/asthma and www.adph.org/