



ASTHMA TRIGGERS

An asthma trigger is a substance or condition that causes irritation or inflammation in the airways; this then leads to asthma symptoms.

Viral respiratory tract infections (“colds”) are the most common trigger of asthma attacks in children. There are many other possible triggers, and most of these can be avoided. Although your child’s triggers may differ from those of someone else, it is important for all children with asthma to avoid their triggers—otherwise they can cause severe symptoms.

For children with asthma problems, these “avoidable” triggers are:

- **Allergens** only affect children who are “sensitized” to them. This means that their immune systems (the body’s defence system) are “primed” and ready to react to the allergen. Common allergens include animal dander, dust mites, pollens, and moulds.
- **Irritants** can bother any child because they do not involve the immune system. Common irritants include second-hand smoke, paint fumes and other strong odours, air pollution, cold air, and high humidity.

Second-hand Smoke

Second-hand smoke usually comes from cigarettes, cigars, or pipes; it also can come from a wood-burning stove or furnace. Second-hand smoke is such a powerful irritant that it increases your child’s risk of developing persistent asthma and having more severe and frequent asthma attacks.

Children have a hard time controlling asthma symptoms if they live with a smoker or even share a car with one. Smoke gets in clothes and hair, in fabric, in furniture and walls, even in stuffed animals; and it can’t be cleared out of a room by just opening a window. Smoke that’s trapped in all these places continues to make asthma worse, even *after* the cigarette is put out.

If you smoke, please make every effort to quit—for the health and safety of your child, as well as for your own health. It’s not enough just to smoke outside. And it’s never too late to quit. Every attempt at quitting smoking will improve your chances of finally kicking the habit for good. And you don’t have to do it alone. There are lots of programs, tools, and resources to make quitting a little easier. Ask your family doctor for help with quitting smoking.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ASTHMA

- **Canadian Lung Association** www.lung.ca
Provides downloadable Action Plans and diary cards, as well as excellent information on inhaler techniques and online asthma courses for parents/patients— in both English and French. Has links to provincial lung associations under the “Contact Us” tab. The **Asthma Action** site <www.on.lung.ca/asthmaaction/asthmaaction.html > has these resources and facts sheets in several additional languages. The direct link to the Asthma Action Plan is www.on.lung.ca/asthmaaction/PDFs/English_ActionPlan.pdf
- **Asthma Society of Canada** www.asthma.ca
Provides many resources, including a customized Asthma Action Plan that can be created on-line, and an online locator for Asthma Educator Centres. It also has a special section <www.asthma-kids.ca> just for kids. Toll-free Asthma Support Line: 1-866-787-4050

