

# ALERT

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## MICHIGAN WINTERS & ASTHMA

by Randall W. Brown, MD, MPH



With the winter season upon us, there are many things to think about for people who have asthma. So what can people with asthma do to stay healthy this winter? The first step should be to check with your doctor about your winter asthma triggers, and make sure you know what to do to prevent and treat your symptoms. This information should be written down in your Asthma Action Plan.

Many people with asthma have symptoms in cold air, and this can be made worse when they exercise or play sports outside. Indoor winter sports, like hockey and basketball, can also cause trouble for people with asthma. Coughing and wheezing, usually starting 5-15 minutes into a winter workout, are common signs that exercise is triggering asthma. Staying inside in the winter can trigger asthma symptoms as well. Three common asthma triggers, dust mites, animal dander and cockroaches, can be worse in the winter when the furnace is on and there is less fresh air in the house.

Regular exercise, especially for people with asthma, is important. The National Heart Lung & Blood Institute (NHLBI) guidelines for asthma advise that prevention of exercise-induced asthma (EIA), in any weather, is the best way to control it. For many people, this means using their prescribed asthma inhalers before exercising. It may also be helpful to cover the mouth and nose with a scarf to create warmth and moisten the air before it enters the lungs. Taking the time to warm-up before being active outside is also important. The body makes chemicals during warm-up that can protect against asthma symptoms later in the work-out.

The winter brings an end to outdoor triggers like pollen, but many people in Michigan also suffer from indoor allergies that can also trigger asthma symptoms. Spending more time indoors during the winter increases the amount of exposure to these indoor triggers. Pets are often indoors more in the winter, so people who have asthma triggered by pet allergies need to pay more attention to their breathing. Simply having the furnace on allows airborne dust, containing fabric fiber, bacteria,

mold spores and animal dander travel through the house. To help your home be more asthma-friendly this winter, keep the humidity level under 50 percent, vacuum carpets regularly (asthmatics out of the house!), wash bedding weekly in hot water, place pillows and mattresses in allergy-proof or airtight covers, clean regularly and damp mop floors to avoid stirring up dust, and keep pets out of your bedroom. If possible, use an efficient, pleated furnace filter. Do not allow smoking inside your home if you or someone in your family has asthma.

With a few prevention plans, people with asthma can enjoy winter, indoors and out. Work with your doctor to find ways to keep your asthma under control, and live a full and active life. ❄️

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- ❄️ In Michigan, 25% of all asthma hospitalizations (1990-2000) occurred during the winter months.<sup>1</sup>
- ❄️ 8.3% of Michigan children, ages 0-17, were reported to currently have asthma by their parents.<sup>2</sup>
- ❄️ 8.8% of Michigan adults ages 18 and over reported that they currently have asthma.<sup>2</sup>

1. Michigan Inpatient Database, Bureau of Epidemiology, Michigan Department of Community Health, Asthma hospitalization defined as a primary discharge diagnosis of Asthma, ICD-9-CM = 493.XX.

2. Preliminary Estimates from the 2001 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey.

## ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



### Strategic Summit Success

Michigan's 12 asthma coalitions, each at varying levels of development, have met to exchange ideas and learn new skills for the past several years.

Recently, representatives from each of these coalitions met to explore the idea of working collaboratively to achieve mutual goals. This group went through strategic planning steps leading to shared mission and vision statements to help define their purpose.

The Mission of the Consortium of Asthma Coalitions is to provide the collective voice for the diverse asthma coalitions to optimize their effectiveness in reducing the disparate and profound burden of asthma in Michigan.

Next steps for this ambitious group include development of the organization's infrastructure, and focusing on goals that will benefit all Michigan coalitions.

"It's exciting to see the coalitions come together in this way-- we will be even more effective in our local groups by keeping collaborative goals in mind," said Jim Moore, Director of Programs for the American Lung Association of Michigan.

Need to find an asthma coalition near you? Want to follow the progress of this group as it continues to develop? Visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org) and click on Coalitions.



Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

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403 Seymour Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48933-1179  
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### WINTER TECHNIQUE TIP: Kids & Inhalers

Ask kids to keep their controller med (usually an inhaled steroid) near their toothbrush so they 1) remember to take it twice a day before they brush their teeth and 2) they can brush their teeth and rinse their mouth so they don't get a mouth infection (thrush). ❄️

### ASTHMA EDUCATOR UPDATE

Congratulations to the first group of asthma educators to successfully pass the National Asthma Educator Certification Board exam. These individuals have achieved the designation Asthma Educator Certified (AE-C).

In Michigan, asthma educator refresher courses, known as Asthma Information Review (AIR), and full college courses through local community colleges, are available to help educators prepare for the exam. ❄️

Visit  
[www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org)  
for more information about asthma  
events & trainings in your area.



### MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

#### January

- 21 [Asthma Overview for Health Plan Case Managers](#), Lyon Meadows Conference Center, South Lyon, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more info: 517-432-9820
- 28 [Asthma Overview for Health Plan Case Managers](#), Kellogg Conference Center, East Lansing, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more info: 517-432-9820

#### February

- 21 [Asthma Information Review \(AIR\) course](#), Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Kalamazoo, 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more info: 734-677-6772

#### March

- 7 [How Asthma SMART Is Your Practice? Professional Education Seminar](#) Marriott Hotel & Conference Center, East Lansing, 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. For more info: 517-484-4541