



GRAND TRAVERSE HERALD

Coalition helps coaches help students

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TRAVERSE CITY -- An asthma diagnosis does not mean a sedentary lifestyle.

Asthma and sports can mix, as a program next week for coaches, sports instructors and physical education teachers will emphasize.

Presented by the Asthma Coalition of Northwest Michigan on Tuesday evening at the Great Wolf Lodge, the program features Dr. James McClellan, who is board certified by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology.

The six-year-old Asthma Coalition offers formal programs twice a year, with the fall one geared to health care providers and the spring one for coaches and educators.

Spreading awareness of what people with asthma can do is the goal for next Tuesday's gathering.

"(Coaches and educators) need to learn signs, symptoms and what to do if someone has a problem and that there's a law in Michigan that kids can carry their inhalers," said Karen Kain, a respiratory therapist at Munson Medical Center.

The idea that having asthma nixes sports was prevalent as recently as 10 years ago. Health care professionals have worked to counter that perception with parents as well as youth sports professionals.

"We still find that, 'Oh no, Jimmy can't do PE because he has asthma,'" Kain said. "Or we have the kids who push through the sport and not realize that they're feeling so punky then we get them proper treatment and then they feel better -- they didn't realize how bad they felt."

In his 11th season coaching girls hockey, Keith Gillis said having a player with asthma on his team is a matter of education and trust among the player, coach and parents. This season, he has two players on his U-16 and U-19 Northstars travel teams with asthma. These young women know how to manage their condition and also make sure they have an inhaler in the team's medical bag on the bench.

"It's just a matter of us being aware that they have a medical condition and that they know how to handle it," he said, noting asthma issues tend to arise more at the beginning of the season when players are not in peak condition.

"I don't see our two players with asthma not participating in anything because of that," Gillis said. "They're doing everything that anyone else is, often more because they want to prove they can."

Gymnast Amanda Ufer, 13, trains 20 hours a week year-round at Water's Edge Gymnastics and is a member of the Level 7 team. She also was diagnosed with asthma at age 5 after a bout with pneumonia and then recurring bronchitis. She currently manages her condition naturally without an inhaler, which kept expiring since she has not needed the medication for two years now.

Still, Amanda knows when to take a short break and her coaches at the gym honor her infrequent requests.

"You can kind of feel it, when you're getting out of breath and it's different; it's like tight," said the Traverse City Christian School eighth-grader.

Communicating with coaches and educating them when necessary is key to successful participation in any sport.

Becky Burden-Cuddeback, women's gymnastics team coordinator and owner of Water's Edge Gymnastics, said the registration form asks about medical conditions. She has found that parents and young gymnasts with asthma are well aware of the signs and treatment. In addition, safety certification training for competitive gymnastics coaches includes information on asthma and other conditions.

"We do get various kids, not just competition kids but kids in our classes," she noted of asthma. "We just make it work."

For more information on or to RSVP for the Sports Induced Asthma program, call 935-6930 by Friday. The dinner and lecture will be held at the Great Wolf Lodge at 6 p.m. Tuesday; registration begins at 5:30 p.m.

For more information on the Asthma Coalition of Northwest Michigan, call Kain at 935-6736. More general asthma information can be found at www.getastmahelp.org.

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Amanda Ufer, 13, does not let asthma hold her back from her dream of competitive gymnastics, training 20 hours a week at Waters Edge Gymnastics in Traverse City. Coaches and educators are invited to learn more about sports and asthma during a Sports Induced Asthma program Tuesday hosted by the Asthma Coalition of Northwest Michigan. Special to the Record-Eagle