

Returning to school will come with additional anxieties and concerns due to COVID-19, especially for families of students with asthma. Better asthma awareness can help you play a role in preventing and managing asthma attacks at school.



Can students with asthma return to school?

In some provinces, families have the option of choosing in-person learning, remote learning, or a blended schooling model for their children.

Most children who have their asthma under control should be able to participate in in-person learning. Parents/guardians should discuss with their child's healthcare provider what is best for their child and family. Through our back-to-school protocol for parents/guardians, we are giving families the asthma control guidance they need to feel confident in their learning environment choices.

NOTE: Asthma doesn't make a student more likely to catch COVID-19, though you should be aware that any respiratory virus can cause an asthma flare-up (attack). COVID-19 is no exception.

Increase your asthma awareness

1. Understand the potential urgency of asthma

Asthma is a chronic (doesn't go away) lung condition that affects the airways (breathing tubes). It's a leading cause of hospitalization for Canadian children. With proper management and access to medications, it can be controlled.



2. Prevent the "September Spike" in asthma attacks

Returning to school can mean more asthma-related hospital visits for children. One of the reasons for the "September Spike" is poor asthma control during summer break.



It's possible that some of your students didn't have their asthma properly managed over the summer, especially as routines were interrupted by the COVID-19. Once in school, they may also be more exposed to colds/other respiratory viruses or environmental triggers that can cause flare-ups.

Watch for these signs that a student's asthma is not under control, and inform the parent/guardian:

- Using a reliever inhaler (usually blue) more than three times per week
- Inability to participate in gym or other physical activities
- Wheezing, difficulty breathing, coughing



3. Limit exposure to classroom asthma triggers

"Triggers" are things that can cause asthma symptoms. Every student with asthma will have their own set of triggers. If a child or their parent/guardian alerts you to a specific trigger, you can help prevent flare-ups by helping the student avoid them.

respiratory viruses (including the common cold) - mould - pollen - pet dander - chalk dust - dust mites - scents - fumes from cleaning products*

NOTE: To protect students from COVID-19, your school will be cleaning the classroom and common areas more often and with stronger cleaning products. The fumes from these chemicals may be an asthma trigger for students. Watch for asthma symptoms in your students and report them to their parent/guardian.

Spotlight: Ryan's Law

Ontario's Ryan's Law was passed in 2015. It outlines all school boards' responsibility to provide a safe school environment for students with asthma.

Thanks to Ryan's Law, Ontario students are allowed to carry their asthma reliever inhaler with them at school. The law is named after 12 year old Ryan Gibbons, who died from an asthma attack at school because he was unable to access his reliever inhaler.

Policies around inhaler access vary by province and by school board.



Download our Managing Asthma Attacks poster and post in your classroom lunghealth.ca/resources

Speak to an expert through our free Lung Health Line

Teachers, we're here for you. Speak to a Certified Respiratory Educator by phone ([1-888-344-LUNG](tel:1-888-344-LUNG)), live chat (lunghealth.ca) or email (info@lunghealth.ca) Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. EST.

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