



PLAY PREPARED

Coach's Quick Reference Guide



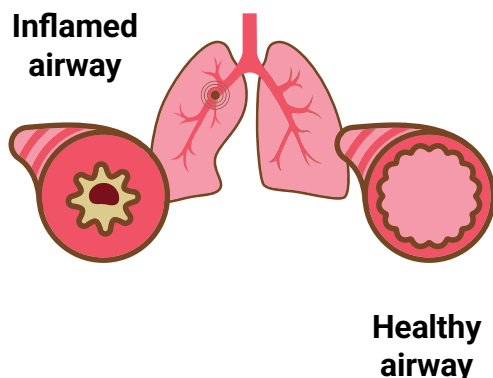
Asthma is common
—sitting out shouldn't be.
With the right support,
players with asthma can
stay in the game.



— Dr. Kevin Asem, Team physician
Canada Soccer Men's U-17/U-20 teams
and Play Prepared Ambassador

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung condition that can inflame and narrow airways, causing shortness of breath, chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing. While there's no cure, asthma can be effectively managed with proper treatment.



Fast facts

- Well-managed asthma doesn't limit athletic performance
- Many elite athletes compete successfully with asthma
- Prepared teams perform better and build stronger bonds
- Your awareness creates a safer, more inclusive environment

Play Prepared is a national movement, led by the Lung Health Foundation, helping children with asthma stay active, stay confident, and stay in the game—at school, at practice, and on the pitch. The campaign's Coach's Quick Reference Guide was clinically reviewed by LHF's team of Certified Respiratory Educators and by Dr. Kevin Asem, Team physician Canada Soccer Men's U-17/U-20 teams and Play Prepared Ambassador

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What are my responsibilities as a coach?

Before the Season Starts...

Establish a process to identify children and youth with asthma

Require families to complete a registration form that asks whether the child has asthma and if they have prescribed inhalers.

Collect Asthma Action Plans

An Asthma Action Plan is a written, individualized worksheet that outlines the steps one must take to stop their asthma from getting worse. It follows a familiar pattern of green (all good!), yellow (take caution!) and red (emergency!) During registration, request copies of completed asthma action plans from parents. Always keep these plans easily accessible.

Have a Private Conversation

Meet with parents of players with asthma. Learn about their triggers, medications, typical symptoms, Asthma Action Plan, and red-zone emergency protocol. Ask about their child's comfort level when discussing their asthma.

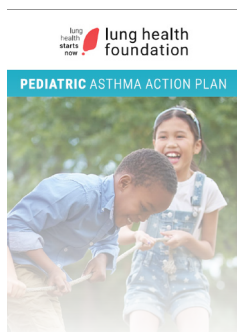
Create an Emergency Plan

Develop a clear plan for asthma emergencies by studying the next page.

Educate Your Team

Normalize asthma with the entire team! Try something like,

"Some teammates have asthma. It's super common. They might need their inhaler sometimes—just like we all need water breaks."





During practices and games

Always Include Warm-Ups

Proper warm-ups prepare airways and reduce exercise-induced symptoms. Start every session with 5-10 minutes of gradual movement.

Watch for Warning Signs

Learn to recognize symptoms:

- Coughing during or after exercise
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Unusual fatigue
- Bent-over posture, hands on knees
- Pale or flushed face

Stop Activity Immediately If Needed

If a player shows symptoms:

1. Stop activity right away
2. Have them sit upright (never lying down)
3. Get their reliever inhaler
4. Follow their Asthma Action Plan
5. Stay calm and reassuring
6. Monitor closely before allowing return to play

Communicate Clearly

Create an environment where players feel safe speaking up.
Use phrases like:

“How is your breathing?”
“Do you need a break?”
“Let me know if you need your inhaler.”

Monitor Environmental Conditions

Be aware of triggers:

- Cold air: Consider indoor alternatives when very cold
- Air quality: Check air quality index and adjust accordingly
- Allergens: High pollen days may affect some players
- Humidity: Extreme humidity can trigger symptoms

Encourage Hydration

Keeping airways moist helps reduce symptoms. Build regular water breaks into practice.

Air quality matters!

Environmental pollutants, smoke, pollen, and extreme temperatures can irritate airways, making breathing difficult and triggering asthma symptoms. The Air Quality Health Index is an online tool that can help you decide whether to adjust activity, move indoors, or ensure medications are used if needed. Just enter your city and check today's rating!





Build an inclusive team culture

Treat Athletes with Asthma Normally

Don't make it a big deal.
Taking an inhaler is as normal as
tying shoelaces or drinking water.
Your attitude sets the tone
for the team.

Celebrate All Players

Highlight the achievements of
players with asthma. Share stories
of professional athletes who excel
with asthma — there are many!

Zero Tolerance for Teasing

Address any teasing or
comments immediately.
Make it clear that your team
supports every player's health needs.

Partner with Parents

Keep communication open.
Update parents after practices or
games if you notice any symptoms
or concerns. Encourage parents
to communicate any changes in
symptoms or concerns they
notice at home.

What to do in the event of an asthma attack?



Check out detailed step-by-steps here

Asthma emergencies can happen anywhere, including the pitch.

Call 911 immediately if

- Breathing is very fast and hard
- Difficulty speaking in full sentences
- Excessive wheezing, coughing and chest tightness
- Appears drowsy or confused
- Reliever medication isn't helping after 10 minutes
- Blue lips or fingernails
- Symptoms are rapidly getting worse

What to do before help arrives

Stay calm – your composure helps the player stay calm

1. Help administer reliever inhaler (as directed on player's Asthma Action Plan) if needed. Use spacer device.

If there is no Action Plan available:

Take 4-6 puffs 1 minute apart.

Repeat in 15-20 minutes.

2. If applicable, have someone call/inform parents.
3. Keep player sitting upright. Loosen any tight clothing.
4. Stay with player until parents or emergency services arrive.

Resources



What to do in
an asthma attack



Proper inhaler
technique video library
(including spacer devices!)



Pediatric asthma
action plan



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Ontario Lung Association is a registered
charity operating as the Lung Health Foundation.