

## WHAT CAN ASTHMA & COPD PATIENTS EXPECT DURING COLD & FLU SEASON?

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### Asthma & COPD Connection to Cold & Flu

- Cold and flu season is always unpredictable, and this year marks one of the most severe to date due to the early arrival of H1N1 and seasonal flu
  - For some high-risk populations, including people with respiratory conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), being prepared for the cold and flu season is especially critical because even a minor respiratory infection like a cold or flu can trigger symptoms like wheezing, cough and chest tightness, all of which may become severe and last a number of days or even weeks
  - During cold and flu season, asthma and COPD patients may not respond as well to the usual daily control asthma and COPD medication and may also require treatment with a rescue inhaler like a short-acting beta agonist (SABA) (e.g., albuterol) for quick relief of symptoms that may flare up
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### How Can Asthma & COPD Patients Protect Themselves During Cold & Flu Season?

- It's even more important that asthma and COPD patients take precautions and be aware of symptoms, even minor symptoms, during the cold and flu season in an effort to avoid an asthma attack or emergency situation
  - During the cold and flu season, people with asthma and COPD should take the following precautions:
    - Get a flu shot
    - Update your asthma or COPD action plan (available at [www.FluandAsthma.com](http://www.FluandAsthma.com))
    - Persistent asthma patients should take a long-term control inhaler such as an inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) as prescribed
    - Have a rescue medication such as albuterol on hand at all times for quick relief of asthma and COPD symptoms that may flare up. It's also a good idea to have an extra inhaler on hand just in case
    - Make sure both control and rescue inhalers have not expired! You may not have used your rescue inhaler in awhile, so it's very important to make sure you know where it is and that it's ready to use
    - Practice good hygiene and take these everyday steps to protect your health:
      - Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough
      - Wash your hands often
      - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
      - Keep your home and work spaces clean
      - Try to avoid close contact with sick people
      - If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone
    - See your doctor immediately if you think you have the flu
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**What is Asthma?**

- Asthma is a long-term lung disease that causes airway inflammation and constriction of smooth muscle around the large and small airways (or bronchial tubes) in the lungs. When something triggers an asthma attack, like cold or flu, your airways become inflamed and swollen and the muscles around your airways tighten (bronchospasm)
- Symptoms of asthma include:
  - Coughing (often occurs at night or early in the morning)
  - Recurring periods of wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe)
  - Chest tightness
  - Shortness of breath
- Some people have asthma that is caused by exercise; this is called exercise-induced bronchospasm (EIB)
- Asthma affects people of all ages, but it most often starts in childhood. In the U.S., more than 22 million people are known to have asthma, including more than 6 million children. Each year in the U.S., asthma causes approximately 500,000 hospitalizations, 134 million days of restricted activity and 4,000 deaths

**What is COPD?**

- COPD is caused by damage to the lungs over many years, usually from smoking. COPD causes airway obstruction and is often a combination of two diseases – chronic bronchitis and emphysema
- COPD symptoms include:
  - Daily coughing, sometimes called "smoker's cough"
  - Shortness of breath during daily activities
  - Excess sputum (mucus) production
  - A feeling of breathlessness
  - Wheezing
- COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. The condition affects more than 12 million Americans and the number is on the rise. It is estimated that another 12 million may have COPD but not realize it

**What treatments are available for asthma/COPD?**

- Asthma and COPD medications are categorized into two general classes:
  - *Long-term control medications (also known as control inhalers)* such as inhaled corticosteroids (ICS) are the preferred long-term treatment option for persistent asthma in children and adults. These should be taken daily and prevent symptoms by reducing inflammation. Inflammation extends into even the smallest airways, so it's important that both the large and small airways are treated to achieve control of asthma and COPD
  - *Quick-relief medications (also known as rescue or quick-relief inhalers)* such as short-acting beta agonists (SABAs) like albuterol, relax smooth airway muscles and relieve bronchospasm. They should be taken as needed to treat acute symptoms and exacerbations (e.g. sudden flare-ups). SABAs are also the treatment of choice for the prevention of EIB
- Not all asthma and COPD medications are the same. People with asthma and COPD should ask their healthcare provider:
  - What is the expiration dating of the inhaler? (e.g., 12 months vs. 24 months)
  - Does the inhaler need to be stored/carried in a specific position?
  - Is the inhaler easy to use?
  - What is the insurance coverage for the inhaler and associated out of pocket cost?

**For More Information**

- Visit [www.FluandAsthma.com](http://www.FluandAsthma.com)