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How to look after your child's asthma this summer

School's out for the summer and children across the UK are rejoicing. But if your child has asthma, it's important to keep up their prevention routine during the break. We ask an expert for their top tips for a safer summer.

Unfortunately, asthma doesn't take a summer break. Every 20 seconds, a child is admitted to hospital because of an asthma attack. And according to Asthma UK, children with the condition are nearly three times more likely to end up in hospital when they go back to school in September compared to August. In order to prevent this happening, parents should know that managing their child's asthma over the school holidays is key.

"When children go back to school in September they are at an increased risk of having a life-threatening asthma attack. This is because many find their asthma is triggered by cold and [flu viruses](#) which are rife at this time of year. Also, if they haven't taken their preventer medication over the summer, it means their airways aren't protected," Sonia Munde, head of services at [Asthma UK](#) explains.

But the good news, she says, is that by taking a few simple steps, parents can help their child to avoid asthma attacks and enjoy the summer as much as anyone else.

Share the care

Munde strongly recommends that parents store a picture of their child's written asthma action plan on their phone and share it with anyone who may be looking after them during the summer.

Such instructions help parents, or anyone else looking after their child, to feel confident about keeping up a child's asthma medication routine over summer. It shows how to spot the signs if their child's asthma is getting worse, and what to do if it is.

If your child doesn't have an asthma action plan yet, you could [download one](#) from Asthma UK and fill it in with your GP or asthma nurse.

Think: prevention

Preventer medicine (usually a brown inhaler) can only protect children if it is used as prescribed. It doesn't relieve symptoms straightaway, and it [can take 7-14 days](#) for its full effect to build up. So parents need to make sure that their child keeps taking it every day.

"The best way parents can help their child manage asthma triggers over summer is for them to make sure they take their usual preventer medicine and keep up a routine over the school break. It takes time to build up the full protection of a preventer inhaler; topping up each day will help keep a child's lungs protected throughout the summer, and when they're back at school," points out Munde.

Preventer medicine works over time to reduce sensitivity, swelling and inflammation in a child's airways so they're less likely to react to triggers (such as [pollen](#) or animals) and won't be bothered by symptoms.

"Setting a reminder on a phone, or keeping a medicine chart on the wall can really help," recommends Munde.

Be emergency ready

An asthma attack can be life-threatening, and parents should ensure that their child always keeps an in-date [reliever inhaler](#) (usually blue) with them.

It means that children or their parents can act quickly if they develop symptoms. A reliever inhaler works by treating asthma symptoms on the spot - to stop an asthma attack in its tracks.

If a child has an [asthma attack](#), parents should help them sit up and keep calm, and help them take one puff of their reliever inhaler every 30-60 seconds, up to ten puffs. Call the local emergency number for an ambulance if their symptoms are getting worse, they don't feel better after 10 puffs, or if you're worried at any time.

Pack the essentials

Asthma medication is just as important as [sun protection](#) if you're heading off on holiday. If a child has [hay fever](#) as well as asthma, parents should pack hay fever treatments such as antihistamines and a nasal steroid spray to deal with these symptoms. Hay fever is a top trigger for children with asthma, so treating hay fever symptoms will help to reduce their risk of an asthma attack.

Parents should carry their child's inhalers – including spares – in their hand luggage and should make sure their child has enough inhalers to last them the whole holiday, plus an extra week's supply to be on the safe side.

"Keeping inhalers close by is always a good idea, and will mean parents can still access them if checked-in baggage goes missing," says Munde.

It's also worth getting your child a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) – although entitlement will need to be checked if Britain leaves the EU – and taking out travel insurance that covers asthma. This should cover any medical costs if your child becomes unwell with their asthma while on holiday, and can cover any additional accommodation or travel costs if they need to go to hospital.

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