



Winter ASTHMA

There's no place like home for the holidays.

For most children, the holiday season means time off from school, gifts from family and loved ones, and plenty of time to play, hopefully in the snow!

But for children with asthma, the holidays mean a heightened risk for a life-threatening asthma attack. Not only do falling temperatures and rampant spread of cold and flu viruses make this time of year dangerous for asthmatics, but allergens in their homes put them at risk as well.

Hospital admissions for asthma peak in the winter months, December and January in particular. The cold air is a known asthma trigger, so before sending kids out into the cold, make sure they wrap up well. A scarf over the face can do wonders to keep the cold air from closing up bronchial passages and making it difficult to breath.

Though the cold air puts asthmatics at risk for an attack, staying indoors comes with its own set of dangers – indoor smoke, increased mold and other asthma triggers. Here are some tips to limit your child's risk of asthma attacks this holiday season.

1. Avoid indoor smoke. A fire in the hearth may be beautiful, but smoke is a common trigger for asthma. If you have an asthmatic child, skip the fire and instead let the smell of hot cider bring a feeling of holiday cheer.
2. Avoid holiday-scented air fresheners. Many enjoy the scent of pine or pumpkin to set the holiday mood. But air fresheners and candles increase the risk of asthma flare-ups in children and should therefore be avoided.
3. Opt for an artificial Christmas tree, instead of a live one. Christmas trees are a common cause of children's allergy attacks. Mold associated with watering live trees, chemicals sprayed on the trees to make them last longer, and pollen from their time on the tree farm are the sources of these attacks. Additionally, tree sap contains terpene and other substances that can irritate the skin and mucous membranes, upsetting an asthmatic child's bronchial system. If you do choose a live tree, try rinsing it outside and allowing it to dry, or blasting it with a leaf blower before bringing it inside.
4. Limit exposure to indoor allergies. Even artificial trees and other decorations can trigger allergy symptoms that can lead to an asthma attack. Store your decorations in

an airtight container and wipe them down before storing. Run an air purifier in the same room as your tree to reduce your child's allergy symptoms.

5. Replace your air filters. When you first start your heating system for the winter, it blows dust and debris, such as mold and pet dander, all over the home. Clean and replace filters before turning your system on and then check them periodically throughout the season to avoid asthma triggers.
6. Keep the temperature and humidity levels in your home consistent.
7. Wash your hands. The whole family. Proper handwashing can help prevent the spread of colds and viruses which can upset the bronchial passages and cause an asthma attack.
8. Get a flu shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend most people over the age of 6 months get a flu shot each year. The flu can be dangerous for those with asthma, even if they keep their asthma symptoms under control. So asthmatic children, as well as those close to them, should all receive an annual flu shot.
9. Prevent asthma flares. Make sure your child takes their medicine as prescribed, even if they are feeling well, and has access to quick-relief medicine, such as a rescue inhaler. Additionally, taking a preventive dose of asthma medicine before heading outside can protect your child from a flare up due to cold and windy weather.
10. Have an asthma action plan. Make sure your child knows what to do if they have an asthma flare. The school nurse should also know this plan. This plan should detail when to call the child's physician and when to take the child to the Emergency Department.

Asthma shouldn't keep a child from experiencing the joy of the holiday season. A little pre-planning and some allergen avoidance can have them caroling along with the rest of the family. Indeed, there's no place like home for the holidays.



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