

For Immediate Release:
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Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph
Community Health Agency

May is National Asthma Awareness Month

Beginning May 1, 2010, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency (CHA) highlights National Asthma Awareness Month. According to the CHA, asthma affects people of all ages, but most often starts in childhood. Locally, in Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties, about 1 in 6 adults report that they have had asthma in their lifetime. In the United States, more than 22 million people are known to have asthma. Nearly 6 million of these people are children. Asthma can't be cured. Even when you feel fine, you still have the disease and it can flare up at any time.

Asthma is a chronic (long term) lung disease. Asthma causes recurring periods of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing. The coughing often occurs at night or early in the morning. The exact cause of asthma isn't known. Researchers think a combination of factors (family genes and certain environmental exposures) interact to cause asthma to develop.

Your doctor can diagnose asthma based on your medical history, a physical exam, and results from tests. Your doctor will figure out your level of asthma severity and determine what treatment you will need and may develop a personal action plan to manage your asthma.

An **asthma attack** happens as the sides of the airways in your lungs swell and the airways shrink. Less air gets in and out of your lungs, and mucus that your body produces clogs up the airways even more. Common symptoms of an attack include

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness and shortness of breath.

Asthma attacks can occur when you are exposed to things in the environment, these are called asthma triggers. Some triggers may include: Allergens found in dust, animal fur, mold, cockroaches, and pollen from trees, grasses and flowers. Irritants such as cigarette smoke, air pollution, chemicals and dust found in the work place. Certain medicines, sulfites in foods and drinks. Exercise or physical activity can also be a trigger. Each person's trigger may be different.

You can control your asthma by knowing the warning signs of an attack, staying away from things that trigger an attack, and follow the advice of your health-care provider. However, sometimes you may need medical attention. Call your doctor for advice if your medicines don't relieve an asthma attack or your peak flow is less than half of your personal best peak flow number.

Call 9-1-1 for an ambulance to take you to the emergency room of your local hospital if:

- You have trouble walking and talking because you're out of breath.
- You have blue lips or fingernails.

With today's knowledge and treatments, most people who have asthma are able to manage the disease. They have few, if any symptoms. They can live normal, active lives and sleep through the night without interruption from asthma.

For more information on asthma contact your local family medical provider or visit the web sites for the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute at www.nhlbi.gov, or the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

For information on services that your local health department, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency provides visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

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