



# Asthma

The number of people with asthma is increasing nationally, and Washington State has been identified as having one of the highest rates in the nation. Having asthma can reduce quality of life, limit activities, and is associated with depression and suicidal thoughts among young people. Youth with asthma may miss school because of their condition, and those with more severe asthma symptoms are less likely to have high academic achievement than youth with few symptoms or those without asthma.



About 7 percent of 6th graders, 9 percent of 8th graders, and 10 percent of 10th graders currently have asthma.

Among students with asthma about 38 percent of 8th graders and 30 percent of 10th graders reported missing school because of their asthma during the past year.

Poor air quality at school can exacerbate asthma and is also associated with decreased student attendance for all students. Air in or around school may be protected or improved by managing of ventilation and filtration systems, using “green” cleaning practices, eliminating moldy building materials and sources of water leaks, reducing “idling” by school bus engines or others waiting to pick-up students, and retrofitting school buses with particle filters or oxidative catalytic converters.

Having an individualized asthma management plan is an important part of preventing or managing “asthma attacks,” regulating medication and reducing environmental triggers.



About one-third of youth with asthma reported ever having a written asthma plan to help them control their medications and exposures.

## **Asthma Policies and Procedures**

During the 2005 session Washington legislators enacted Senate Bill 5841 (RCW 28A.210.370). This new law requires schools to allow children to self-carry asthma rescue medications, as authorized by parents and a healthcare provider. It also requires schools to adopt policies for asthma rescue procedures and to conduct staff training.

Principals reported most secondary schools were already implementing school-based asthma management procedures prior to new policy requirements:

- 94 percent allowed students to self-carry inhalers.
- 92 percent identified and tracked all students with asthma.
- 76 percent obtained and used asthma action plans (or individualized health plans) for all students with asthma.
- 37 percent provided intense case management for students with asthma who are absent 10 or more days per year.

Students with severe asthma may need accommodations to help them participate in physical education. Principals reported most secondary schools addressed this need with the following provisions:

- 94 percent encouraged full participation in PE when students with asthma are doing well.
- 88 percent provided modified PE activities as indicated by the student’s asthma action plan.



### **Asthma Instruction**

Health teachers reported about 19 percent of secondary schools included asthma education as part of health curriculum in at least one grade.

About half (52 percent) of school principals reported that it is their policy to provide education for students with asthma about how to control their asthma.

### **Asthma Staff Development**

Principals reported about half (54 percent) of secondary schools educated their staff about asthma as part of an asthma prevention and control program.

Health teachers were not asked whether they wanted more training or development about asthma.

### **Asthma Resources**

The American Lung Association of Washington and the Washington State Department of Health have partnered to provide the “Asthma Management in Educational Settings” (AMES) manual, a handbook for clinical management of asthma in school settings: <http://www.alaw.org/asthma/ames/>.

The Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools (IAQ TFS) Kit shows schools how to carry out a practical plan of action to improve indoor air problems at little or no cost using straightforward activities and in-house staff. The toolkit is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/toolkit.html>.