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Doctor's tips for managing asthma in children

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(Photo: Getty Images)

May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness month, and were you aware that asthma is one of the most common, recurring childhood diseases – with close to 174,000 children diagnosed in New Jersey?



Aindaye Amos, 10, (left), Benjamin Stephenson, 9, learn about asthma as part of BEAM program: Breathe Easier with Asthma Management. (Photo: courtesy of Boys & Girls Club of Newark)

And, as the end of the school year approaches, I'm reminded that asthma is one of the leading causes of school absences – affecting more than 7 million children in the U.S. and close to 200,000 children in New Jersey.

Being out of school for the summer also brings increased opportunities for common childhood asthma triggers, so now is an opportune time to create a treatment plan, or revisit the existing plan you have with your child. Asthma attacks can be prevented and managed so that your child can live a normal, healthy life.

However, only 56% of the state's children ages 5 to 12, diagnosed with asthma, have a treatment plan. And even worse, the same percentage of youth who are utilizing quick relief medications are not using them properly.

New Jersey hospitals report nearly 19% of kids ages 5 to 12 had an asthma-related emergency room visit in the past year. The numbers are only slightly better for the state's teens ages 13 to 18. Sixty percent of the state's teens with asthma have a treatment plan, and only 53% use their quick relief medication correctly.

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey has, through our Foundation, partnered with the Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey to effectively raise awareness about asthma – and how to manage it – through an initiative called Breathe Easier with Asthma Management (BEAM).

The primary goal of BEAM is to raise awareness about asthma and educate Boys & Girls Club members and their parents or caregivers about asthma and how best to manage it.

BEAM is now in its third phase, this year the hands-on educational asthma awareness program will impact 2,800 children at 20 Boys & Girls Clubs at

57 different locations in 14 counties across the state.

For parents of children with asthma, the following tips will help ensure a happy, healthy summer of easy breathing.



Ensure your child knows the warning signs for an asthma attack.

(Photo: Getty Images)

1. Manage your asthma

Ensure your child knows the warning signs for an asthma attack, tells an adult so someone can help, and takes their medicine – in addition to resting and relaxing.

2. Plan ahead

This allows you and your child control of your exposure to triggers, which include allergies, irritants, cold weather, pollution and even strong fragrances.

3. Identify the signs that indicate when to use the quick-relief inhaler

When a child first starts to cough, wheeze, have chest tightness, shortness of breath or a drop in the peak flow, they should know that is the time to use a quick-relief inhaler.

4. Create an Asthma Action Plan

With the help of your medical professional, create a plan and educate your child on the steps and its importance. Review often!



The primary goal of BEAM is to raise awareness about asthma and educate Boys & Girls Club members and their parents. Jordyn Osorio, 10, learns more about asthma. *(Photo: courtesy of Boys & Girls Club of Newark)*

5. Know when to activate your Asthma Action Plan

Refer to your Asthma Action Plan right away if you notice wheezing or coughing does not improve after medicine has had time to work (5 to 10 minutes for quick relief inhalers), peak flow rate drops to 50% or less of personal best, difficulty breathing, trouble walking and talking. If fingernails or lips turn blue, call an ambulance right away.

Dr. Paul G. Alexander is vice president, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, and chief medical officer, government programs. Dr. Alexander also serves on the Board of Directors of The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey. He is an emergency medicine physician and is committed to improving the quality of care and service for the chronically ill and underserved. For more information on the Horizon Foundation or the Boys & Girls Club of NJ, visit

Community.HorizonBlue.com and bgcnj.org.

<http://www.app.com/story/life/wellness/2017/05/23/doctor-asthma-tips-children/102008050/>