

Asthma

What's Asthma and Why is It Such a Problem???

Make copies to give to more kids!

Asthma is the narrowing of the airways in your lungs. When that happens it is difficult to breathe. Certain things in the air we breathe or the food we eat may cause severe breathing difficulties or an asthma attack. These are called triggers. Sometimes these attacks can be triggered by pollution or exercise. Some kids are born with asthma and some kids begin to have (acquire) asthma or breathing difficulties while growing up. Asthma can usually be controlled with medicine or proper behavior, but way too many kids are very, very sick from this disease. ✓ Since 1976, childhood asthma cases have increased by 200%. That means millions of kids miss school and don't have much fun!

Facts about Kids and Asthma

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- More than 4.8 million children under 18 years of age have asthma. Thousands more are suffering from asthma but they haven't been able to see a doctor yet.
- More kids miss school because of asthma than any other chronic (continual) illness.
- Over 150,000 children are hospitalized from asthma each year.
- The cost of treating asthma is over \$6 billion a year.
- More kids in poor inner-city areas have asthma than in other areas.

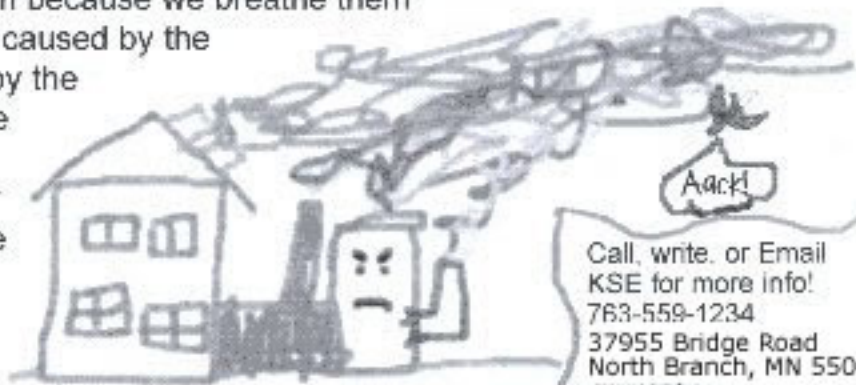
That's a lot of money!!

Is our environment to blame??

We don't know exactly how much a polluted environment can make us sick, but we are learning more every day. We do know that some illnesses have been linked to pollution, especially asthma and other respiratory (breathing) problems like bronchitis and pneumonia.

What Causes Asthma?

Outdoor Air Pollutants are contributing to the increases in the number of kids with asthma. Scientists have found that there are many pollutants in the air that we breathe. Although most of these have difficult names like **carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter**, we should learn and remember them because we breathe them every day. Much of this pollution is caused by the cars we drive. Lots of it is caused by the factories that make products that we buy. When we heat or cool our homes, we are also creating outdoor air pollution that may make us sick.



Call, write, or Email KSE for more info!
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Indoor Air Pollutants like the **hazardous substances found in building materials, carpeting, and some chemicals that we use for cleaning, killing pests (pesticides), gardening, lawn care, and synthetic scents** can make us sick. **Tobacco smoke** from smoking or second hand smoke is another form of pollution that can cause breathing problems like asthma. There are over 4,000 chemicals in smoke and several of these chemicals can make us very ill.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are some confusing words that mean chemicals that evaporate from items in your home, school, or other areas. For instance, **formaldehyde is a VOC gas used in things like paints, coatings, cosmetics, fabrics, insulation, plywood, and particle board.** Formaldehyde may trigger or cause asthma and other breathing problems. Other examples of VOCs include some cleaning products, some glues, dry-cleaning fluids, and wood preservatives.

Nitrogen Oxides are air pollutants that come from **cars or power plants**, but they are sometimes in our homes as well. For example, **gas ranges, gas pilot lights, and gas or kerosene hot water heaters** may be adding this type of asthma trigger to your air.

Allergens such as house dust mites, pet hair dander, pollen, molds, cockroaches, bacteria, and viruses can also make asthma worse.

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So What's a Kid to Do about Asthma?

1. Ask to see a Doctor or tell your school nurse if you think you have breathing problems.
2. Check out your home and school environment to see if you are surrounded by some of the asthma "triggers" we have mentioned. Go to KSE's web site to print out a Toxic Tour Guide for your home. Use it with your parents to make your home a healthier place to live. Go to <http://www.kidsforsavingearth.org/toxictourguide.htm>
3. Write or E-mail letters (addresses below) to Kids for Saving Earth. Explain your concerns about the increase in childhood asthma. We'll send these letters to government and corporate leaders.
4. Make sure your home is well ventilated. The indoor air is sometimes worse for you than the outdoor air. So open your windows a bit and let the fresh air in.
5. Much of our outdoor polluted air comes from cars or power factories. That means to help clean up the air we should use less energy. Car pooling, bike riding, walking, or using less electricity in your home are all good ways to use less energy.
6. **Ask Your Instructor to Join KSE for FREE to learn more about the Environment!**



Be sure to have several of the teachers in your school join KSE as well. Most of our educational materials are free and we send E-Pal® alerts to our KSE Network. **Fax form to: 763-559-6980** or **Send to: KSE, 37955 Bridge Road, North Branch, MN 55056** or **E-mail: KSEWW@aol.com**

Name		
Organization	Position/Title	
Street Address		
City	State	Zip
Work Phone	Fax	Home Phone
E-mail Address	Your Web site Address	
Number of Members	Agas	to

For more info about asthma and other environmental health problems: The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Children's Health Protection Web site: www.epa.gov/children and The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) web site: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/child/