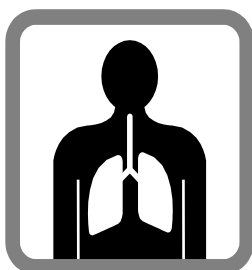


Emergency Services

Asthma (Adult)

What is Asthma?

Asthma (sounds like *az-muh*) is when the airways (or breathing tubes) in your lungs become swollen and irritated. This makes it difficult to breathe.



No one knows what causes asthma. Asthma can be triggered by:

- an allergy (such as dust, mould, pollen, or animal dander)
- an irritant (such as smoke, air pollution, strong fumes, or perfume)
- a reaction to a medicine
- heavy exercise
- a cold or a chest infection
- emotions (such as anger or anxiety)
- changes in the air temperature

Once you have asthma, you will always have asthma. Your family doctor will help you learn how to live with asthma, control it, and limit attacks.

When to get help

It is best to get help early. **Do not wait** until your asthma attack is severe.

Call your doctor if:

- You are short of breath with activity.
- You become wheezy when resting.
- You find it hard to walk or talk because of your breathing.
- Your breathing does not improve within 15 minutes of using your inhaler medicine.
- You need to use your inhaler medicine every 2 to 3 hours.
- You are feeling faint.
- You are tired from the hard work of breathing.
- You are not sleeping well because of your breathing.

Call 9-1-1 right away if:

- You suddenly find you have:
 - Shortness of breath
 - Severe wheezing
 - Severe coughing
 - Chest tightness
- You do not get any relief from your inhaler medicine.
- You can not speak because you can not get your breath.
- Your lips or fingers are turning blue.

How to take care of yourself at home

When you get home:

- Rest.
- Take medicine(s) as directed.
- Have someone stay with you or check on you today.
- Make an appointment to see your family doctor within 24 to 48 hours.
- Protect yourself from things that can trigger an attack.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Your pharmacist
- Fraser Health Virtual Care
1-800-314-0999 or live chat online at fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare
10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at HealthLinkBC.ca

Tips for living with Asthma

- Any time you see a new health professional, make sure you tell that person about your asthma.
- Wear a medical identification tag (Medical Alert) to let others know about your asthma.
- Make an 'asthma action plan' with your doctor. This is a plan for what actions you and others around you need to take if you have a severe attack. Write it down and post copies at home, school, or work.

Adapted with permission from 'Asthma – Going Home' (May 2009) by Providence Health Care.