

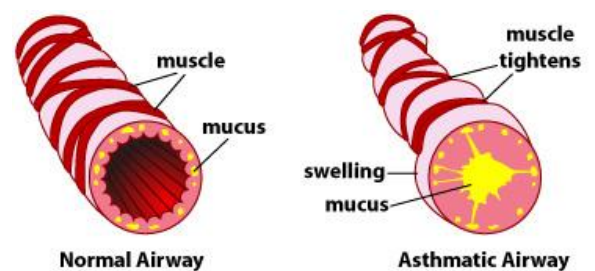
# Asthma in Children

Asthma is a common condition in children in Australia. It is one of the main reasons children visit doctors or hospitals. Asthma means that the airways - the tubes that carry air to the lungs - can become inflamed and narrowed.

The most common asthma triggers in young children are colds and flus. Other triggers can include exercise, smoke (from bushfires, cigarettes, or vaping), animals, grass pollens, mould, and changes in weather. When these triggers are present, the muscles around the airways tighten, leading to swelling and increased mucus. These changes make it harder to breathe.

**Symptoms** of asthma in children may range in severity and can include:

- Difficulty breathing
  - Sucking in between the ribs, at the stomach or at the neck
  - Breathing faster than normal
- Wheezing
  - High pitched noise heard more commonly when breathing out
- Coughing
  - Ongoing, persistent, or worse at night
- Chest tightness or a heavy feeling in the chest



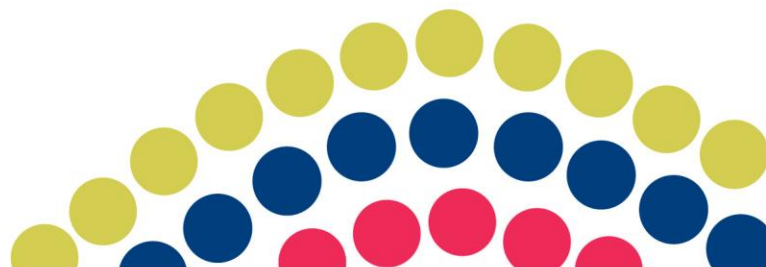
**The symptoms of asthma can vary from mild to severe. Some asthma flare ups can appear quickly, while others may take days to worsen. Asthma symptoms can be helped with treatment and by following your Asthma Action Plan.**

## Asthma Medications - Reliever

### Salbutamol (blue puffer)

Relievers are used both in **EMERGENCY** situations and to treat asthma symptoms '**as required**'. They work to relax the muscles around the narrowed airways. They can work in 5-15 mins and last for 3-6 hours. Some side effects can include shaky hands, a faster heartbeat, feeling excited or trouble sleeping. These side effects usually go away after a little time.

Relievers should only be used when you or your child has symptoms (or if your doctor tells you to use before exercise). If you or your child are using salbutamol *more than twice per week when feeling well* (typically for symptoms with exercise or at night), it may mean that you or your child's asthma is not well controlled. You should see your GP for an asthma check-up.



### For more information

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Government of South Australia  
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Women's & Children's Hospital

Reference: Asthma Australia, 2024.

## Asthma Medications – Preventers

Preventers are not prescribed for every child with asthma. These medicines help keep the airways in the lungs less inflamed by reducing swelling and mucus. This helps keep asthma under control. Preventers should be taken every day as prescribed, even if you or your child do not have symptoms. They take time to reach their full effect. Make sure to rinse the mouth out after use.

## Asthma Medications – Oral Steroids

Oral steroids are sometimes prescribed by a doctor to treat asthma flare ups. They are taken by mouth as a liquid or tablet with food. Steroids are strong medications used to help reduce inflammation in the airways during asthma flare ups. Oral steroids usually start working within 2 hours.

**It is important to use a spacer with you or your child's puffer so the medicine can reach the smaller airways in the lungs.**

It is recommended that parents and carers supervise their child's puffer and spacer technique every time it is used.

## How to use a puffer and spacer

Use a mask when child is 4 years and under.

1. Check that your puffer is in date and not empty.
2. Remove cap from puffer, hold the puffer upright and shake well.
3. Insert puffer upright into the end of the spacer +/- mask.
4. Sit yourself or your child upright in a comfortable position.
5. Place spacer in mouth or mask over the child's mouth and nose.
6. Press one dose from the puffer into the spacer.
7. Keep spacer in place until 4 breaths have been taken.
8. Ensure the spacer valve appears to be opening and closing.
9. Repeat steps 2-8 if another dose is required.



## How to clean your spacer and mask

Wash your spacer and mask in warm water with dish soap. Do not rinse the spacer. Let it dry overnight. Do not use a paper towel or towel to dry the inside of the spacer.

*Clean your spacer every week and replace it every year or as recommended by the manufacturer.*

**Ensure that your trusted health professional checks your medication administration technique and Asthma Action Plan at every opportunity.**