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Asthma and Springtime Don't Mix for Texas Children

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Asthma affects more children than any other chronic disease and can interfere with simple childhood activities like running and playing outside, especially when pollen counts are high. Photo by D. Sharon Pruitt, used via Creative Commons License.

By Margaret Nicklas

For Reporting Texas

Amy Edwards' 5-year-old son suffers from asthma, like hundreds of thousands of other children in Texas. Though she's never had to take Bowie to the emergency room because of it, she is all too familiar with how simple things, like weather changes or outdoor activities, can provoke an attack.

Edwards recounted a time she took Bowie to the park and let him "roll down hills" as children love to do. "It was that time of year when stuff was just covered with pollen," she said. "He was sick for days and days." Asthma affected more than [25 million Americans](#) in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including [1.8 million Texans](#) as of 2008. Nearly 34 percent were children. In fact, the disease affects more children than any other chronic disease and is one of the most frequent reasons for hospital admissions among children in Texas, according to a 2009 report by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Late winter and spring may be especially difficult for people in Austin living with asthma, especially children who want to be outdoors. From February on, pollen levels from trees, grasses and weeds begin to climb throughout Central Texas. These conditions, along with viral infections, top the list of triggers for asthma patients this time of year, said Jeremy Kissire, a respiratory case manager at Dell Children's Medical Center in Austin.

"This time of the year is actually the peak season, is when we see most of our asthmatics," he said. "It's when we are the busiest."

About 1,650 children have been admitted to Dell's for asthma since January 2010, according to data that Kissire tracks. Heavy admissions also occur in the fall when school starts, he said. These figures represent the more acute cases, and do not include children seen in the ER with asthma and released.

Managing asthma in children can be complicated. To avoid an asthmatic episode, Edwards pays close attention to the allergy reports as well as her son's activities. She knows what affects him, such things as hay and grass pollen, illness, running and "weather." But despite her precautions, some flare-ups can't be prevented and will last for days when they occur. Edwards keeps the prescription medicine Albuterol on hand for those times.

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Coping with a child's asthma may be especially challenging for some parents. A [2005 national study](#) found that some segments of the population under-use medications, which may make controlling the disease more difficult. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America's report suggested that "parents' beliefs about the role and usefulness of medications, concerns about adverse effects, poor literacy, and distrust of and poor communication with physicians" were likely causes for recurring flareups.

The state, through a federal grant, funds a program that aims to address these issues. The Seton Asthma Center's intervention program helps people with various aspects of disease management, including obtaining prescriptions, said Chris Valmores, the program's clinical operations manager. It also educates caregivers about the disease and helps them connect with a primary care provider.

Helping people manage their asthma and do it independently — without hospitalization — is a goal of the program, Valmores said. Services are free of charge and available to anyone, insured or uninsured.

Researchers don't understand what causes asthma or how to prevent or cure the disease. Until they do, Amy Edwards and others like her will continue to watch the allergy reports and local weather, looking for those days when playing outside won't cause their children more harm than good, while keeping the asthma medicine close at hand.

A paragraph about recurring flareups among asthmatic children has been updated.

2 Responses to "Asthma and Springtime Don't Mix for Texas Children"



James Martone says:

[June 14, 2012 at 5:14 pm](#)

Thank you Ms. Niklas for this interesting look into what thousands of kids and their parents go through because of asthma. I hope it stirs more action toward finding cures.



[asthmatic treatments](#) says:

[May 21, 2013 at 12:57 am](#)

Once you faint, your would automatically start breathing air on your own again and become alert in a minute or so. No danger.

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