

Fact Sheet

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the airways. The main goal for people living with asthma is control. Properly managing your asthma can reduce the number and severity of your asthma attacks. Left untreated, asthma can cause long-term lung damage, frequent visits to the emergency room, and hospitalizations.

Office of Minority Health and Health Equity

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (long-term) condition that causes the airways to become inflamed and narrow. Symptoms of an asthma attack include coughing, periods of wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath.

More than 24 million people in the United States have asthma, and nearly 6 million of them are children. African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans, are at higher risk of asthma than people of other races or ethnicities. African American and Hispanic/Latino children are also more likely to die from asthma-related complications.



Common asthma triggers

Asthma symptoms can vary from person to person. The severity of symptoms can change over time. Some triggers that can worsen these symptoms include:

- Dust
- Mold
- Pollen
- Tobacco smoke
- Air pollution
- Perfumes or cologne
- Pet dander (animal skin or hair)
- Respiratory illness such as the cold or flu

Uncontrolled asthma can lead to:

- Shortness of breath
- Long-term damage to the lungs and airways
- Increased use of quick-relief medications
- Increased hospital stays and emergency room visits
- Decreased productivity, missed work or school days

Asthma treatments

There are two main types of FDA-approved medications used to treat asthma: quick-relief medications and medications intended for long-term control.

- **Quick-relief medications** work fast to treat sudden symptoms at the onset of an asthma attack or flare-up. They are inhaled to help relax the muscles of your airways and provide quick relief of symptoms during an asthma attack.
- **Long-term control medications** are used on a regular basis to reduce the inflammation and constriction of the airways that cause asthma symptoms. They can be taken orally, injected, or inhaled.

You should talk to your health care provider to create an Asthma Action Plan (AAP). An AAP outlines how and when to take your medications.

Asthma and clinical trials

The FDA encourages diverse participation in clinical trials. If you think a clinical trial may be right for you, talk to your health care provider. You can also search for clinical trials in your area at www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For more information on health equity, visit www.fda.gov/healthequity.