

An open letter regarding keeping children with asthma safe while participating in sports on the occasion of World Asthma Day

May 5, 2026

More than one in 10 children in Canada have asthma. With few exceptions, a child with well-controlled asthma can and should get regular exercise and participate in sports. However, even a child with well-controlled asthma is at risk of an asthma attack—which is a medical emergency and, in rare cases, can be fatal.

Today on World Asthma Day and as the summer sports season is fast approaching, we are calling on individuals across Canada involved in children's sports, including leaders of amateur and school sports organizations, coaches and other volunteers, and parents of children with asthma, to take some time to learn more about asthma and what to do in case of an asthma attack. Below, we have included a list of ways that individuals can become "asthma aware and prepared" to best support these children and their safe participation in organized sports.

Learn about asthma and its symptoms and triggers.

Although not all people with asthma have the same symptoms, there are some that are more common, like wheezing, shortness of breath and coughing. Triggers can include allergens like freshly cut grass, pollen, dust or animal dander. Things like cold air, smoke, strong scents and even exercise can also trigger symptoms.

Be prepared.

We have included with this letter C.A.R.E., a framework created by Asthma Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Lung Association, to help individuals respond quickly and appropriately in the event of an asthma attack. C.A.R.E. stands for: Keep them **calm**; sit them upright to help with **airflow**; help them use their **rescue** inhaler; and call **emergency** services (911) if symptoms do not improve or if no inhaler is available. Knowing and acting on C.A.R.E. can save a life.

Share.

Ask your association or other governing body about their asthma training and protocols. Share the C.A.R.E. materials and encourage them to visit **asthma.ca** to find additional updated information and resources. Share the protocol with all supervising adults involved with your team or activity to ensure they are aware of what to do in the event of an asthma attack.

Start a conversation.

Not everyone with asthma has the same symptoms and triggers. If you have a child with asthma on your team, speak to their parent(s) or guardian(s) at the beginning of the season. Tell them you'd like to learn more about the severity of their child's asthma, their asthma triggers and to what extent the child is able to manage their medications and symptoms without adult assistance. Reinforce the importance of having the child's rescue inhaler immediately accessible at all games and practices. Parents may share a copy of the child's asthma action plan.

Help reduce the risk.

Pay attention to the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) and avoid holding outdoor practices, games or other events when the air quality is poor. Poor air quality can trigger asthma symptoms, especially because children breathe deeper and faster during exercise. With an increasing number of wildfires and other sources of air pollution, it's more important than ever to follow the health warnings of the AQHI.

By taking asthma seriously while also supporting safe participation, we can help ensure that children with asthma are not excluded from sport or physical activity. Asthma should be understood and planned for. Being prepared, recognizing symptoms early, and normalizing the use of rescue inhalers and asthma protocols allows children with asthma to build confidence, stay active, and participate fully alongside their peers. With awareness, preparation, and shared responsibility, sport can remain a safe, inclusive, and positive experience for everyone.

Sincerely,



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An asthma attack is potentially a life-threatening emergency

Signs of an asthma attack include:

- Wheezing
- Distressed breathing
- Difficulty speaking
- Chest tightness
- Persistent coughing
- Lips or fingernails turning blue or grey



If an asthma attack happens: C.A.R.E.



C

Calm

Keep them **CALM** and reassure them.



A

Air

Sit them upright and encourage slow breathing to ensure **AIR** reaches their lungs.



R

Rescue inhaler

Help them find and use their **RESCUE INHALER** (usually blue)*.



E

Emergency

Call **EMERGENCY SERVICES (911)** if there is no inhaler or no improvement after using the inhaler.

**If available, use a spacer to help the medicine reach the lungs more effectively.*

C.A.R.E. guidance provides general public information & does not replace personalized advice or an Asthma Action Plan from a healthcare professional.


Asthma.ca[™]
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www.asthma.ca/care

Canadian Lung Association
B R E A T H E