

# Asthma and Allergies

June's focus is on asthma and allergies. This is the peak season for people with asthma and allergies and a great time to learn more about these conditions. Some people may have one or both conditions. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America,

- More than 25 million have asthma. (Women are more likely to have asthma and die from it than men. It's more common in boys than girls.)
- Asthma is a leading chronic disease in children.
- More than 50 million experience various types of allergies each year, and of these, about 25 million have seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever).
- Allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic illness.

Asthma and allergies are conditions that can occur at any age. The underlying cause is largely unknown, but both tend to run in families. Neither are curable for most patients, but both can be controlled with proper prevention and treatment. Discuss your symptoms with your primary care provider—they are trained to manage most issues with asthma or allergies. They may refer you to an Allergist/Immunologist or Pulmonologist to help diagnose or manage your condition. Whatever your medical team looks like, you should work together on your asthma or allergy treatment and management plan to help you feel and live better. An asthma control plan is one of the most important steps to managing your asthma—to keep you breathing well and avoid the ER and hospital care.

**Learn more** with these activities:

- Activity 1: Asthma vs. allergies
- Activity 2: Spot the differences
- Activity 3: Control your asthma
- Activity 4: Healthier home checklist



 **Questions?** Email [Wellness@Medica.com](mailto:Wellness@Medica.com)

# Health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups. Health Disparities are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, the ability to access healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all incredibly important to your overall health.

People who face health disparities often have a higher risk for asthma and allergies. In the U.S., certain racial and ethnic groups experience a higher risk of asthma regardless of neighborhood income or population\*.

## Did you know?

- Blacks and American Indian/Alaska Natives have the highest current asthma rates compared to other races and ethnicities. Blacks (10.9%) are 42% more likely than Whites (7.7%) to have asthma.\*\*
- While asthma rates are relatively low for Hispanics overall, rates vary significantly among subgroups. Puerto Ricans in the continental United States have the highest current asthma rate of any racial or ethnic group.\*\*
- African Americans have significantly higher adjusted odds of allergy to finfish.\*\*\*

## Learn more:

- \*[UW School of Medicine and Public Health](#)
- \*\*[American Lung Association: Asthma demographics](#)
- \*\*\*[National Library of Medicine](#)

# Activity 1: Asthma vs. allergies

Test your knowledge. Read the statements below and guess which condition it applies to. Then learn more about these conditions on the educational chart on page 3. (Answers provided on page 3.)

	Asthma	Allergies
1. The most common condition affecting the human respiratory tract	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Common treatments include epinephrine and/or antihistamines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Tobacco smoke is one of the most common triggers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Common symptoms: Wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Occurs when a weak immune system responds to a foreign substance that is normally harmless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Common symptoms: Itchy/water eyes, sneezing, rashes, and wheezing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. A leading cause of kids missing school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Most common triggers are pollen, milk, and nuts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Can be controlled with regular use of anti-inflammatory medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What's the difference between asthma and allergies? Though they are often spoken of together, they are different conditions. Allergies can commonly, but not always, cause asthma symptoms. Learn more with this educational chart.

	Asthma	Allergies
<b>Definition + diagnosis</b>	<p>A condition in which a person's airways become inflamed, become narrower due to swelling and produce extra mucus—all of which makes it difficult to breathe.</p> <p>Diagnosed through physical exam and lung function tests (e.g., spirometry).</p>	<p>Abnormal and unusual response of the immune system to substances in the environment.</p> <p>Diagnosed through skin prick tests and blood tests.</p>
<b>Organs affected</b>	Lungs and airways.	Multiple organs such as the nose, lungs, throat, skin, lining of stomach, eyes and sinuses. Frequently allergies cause asthma symptoms
<b>Common signs + symptoms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Coughing</li> <li>• Wheezing</li> <li>• Sensation of chest tightness</li> </ul>	<p>Symptoms vary widely and depend on how you're exposed. Some symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itchy, watery eyes</li> <li>• Itchy and/or runny nose</li> <li>• Sneezing</li> <li>• Rashes</li> <li>• Hives (a rash with raised red patches)</li> <li>• Stomach cramps</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> <li>• Bloating</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Throat closing</li> <li>• Wheezing</li> </ul>
<b>Common causes</b> (can vary from person to person)	<p>Inflammation, mucus production, and airway narrowing can start for lots of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viral infections</li> <li>• Allergies</li> <li>• Emotional upsets</li> <li>• Chemical irritants such as smoking or smoke exposure</li> <li>• Change in temperature or humidity</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> </ul>	<p>Many different allergens are responsible for allergic reactions and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollen</li> <li>• Dust</li> <li>• Food (e.g., fish, peanuts, shellfish, eggs)</li> <li>• Insect stings</li> <li>• Animal dander</li> <li>• Mold</li> <li>• Medications/Drugs</li> <li>• Latex</li> </ul>

[Learn more](#) about asthma causes and treatment.

[Learn more](#) about allergy prevention and treatment.

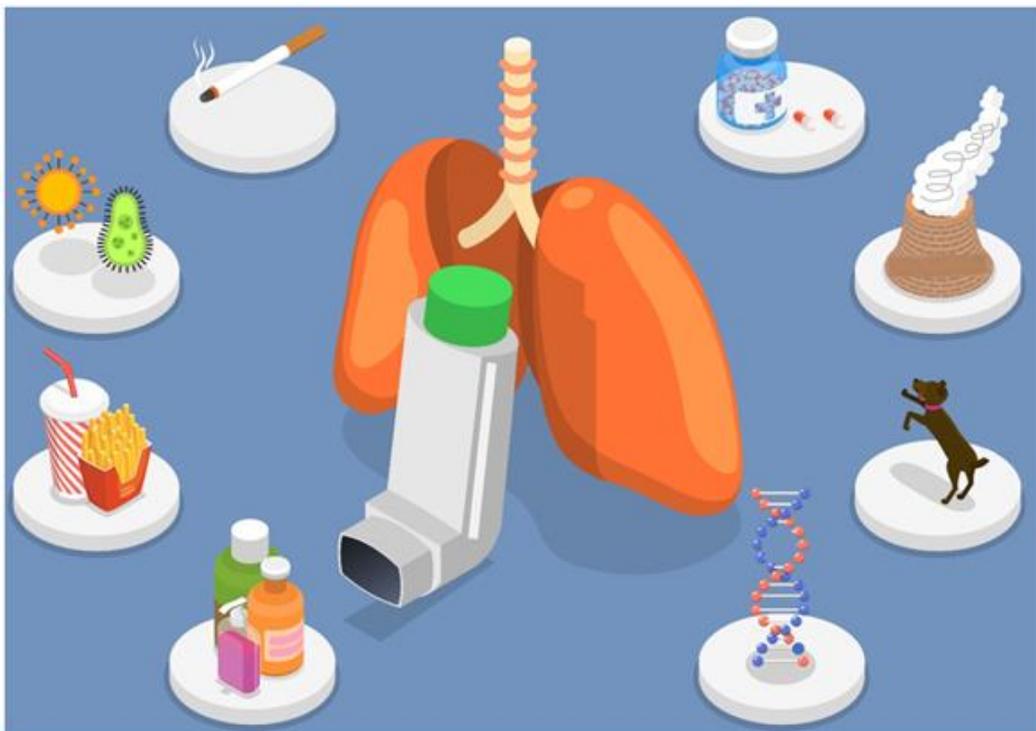
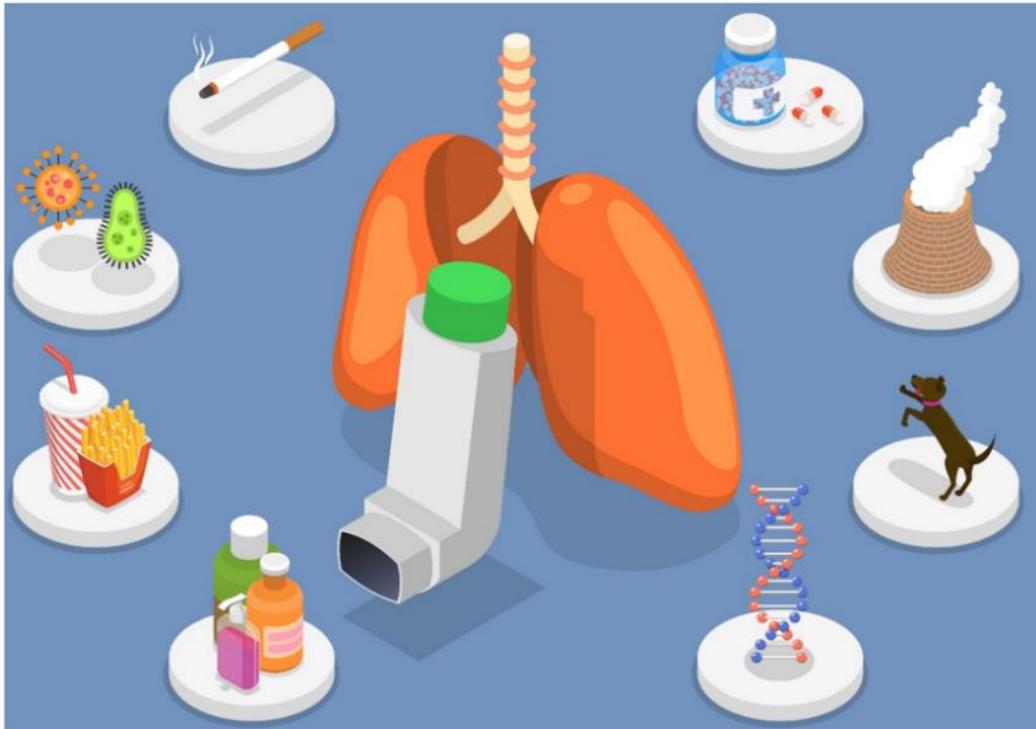
[Learn more](#) about allergy test types.

*Answer Key: Asthma vs. Allergies  
Asthma = 1, 3, 4, 7, and 9  
Allergies = 2, 5, 6, and 8*

## Activity 2: Spot the differences

Can you spot the 10 differences between the asthma and allergen irritants in these two pictures?

*(Answers provided on page 4.)*



# Activity 3: Take action to control your asthma

When your airways become narrow from asthma, you're likely to have shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing and coughing. Having an asthma action plan can help you keep your asthma under control. Work with your health care provider to create the best asthma action plan for your health. Ask about these possible action plan zones to guide your care.

## Know the signs

**When you're in the "green zone," you're doing well.** You should:

- Have no coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or difficulty breathing
- Be able to work, play, exercise or do your everyday activities with no symptoms
- Have a peak-flow reading of 80% to 100% of your personal best

**When you're in the "yellow zone," you should take caution.** This means you are:

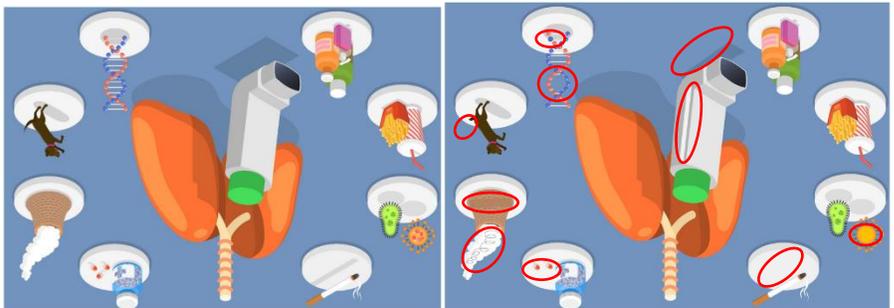
- Coughing, wheezing, feeling tightness in your chest or having difficulty breathing
- Able to do some, but not all, usual activities
- Waking up at night due to asthma
- Getting 50% to 79% of your personal best when you use your peak-flow meter

**When you're in the "red zone," contact your provider immediately.**

*If you cannot reach your provider, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911.*

This means you are:

- Very short of breath
- Having problems walking or talking due to asthma symptoms
- Not responding to quick-relief medicines
- Having symptoms that are the same or getting worse after 24 hours in the "yellow zone"
- Getting a peak-flow reading of less than 50% of your personal best



Answer Key: Spot the Differences

## Activity 4: Healthier home checklist

People spend more than 90% of their time indoors. Your Indoor air can be up to five times more polluted than outdoor air, per the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and an estimated 3.2 million deaths are related to household air pollution annually, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

It's not easy to avoid problem-causing allergens entirely, but you can lessen the impact. This checklist offers tips to improve the indoor air quality of your home and lower the impact on your allergies and/or asthma.

- Replace the air filters in your HVAC system as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Clean your living space once a week to remove dust, pollen, mold, and animal dander.
- Select easy-to-clean home furnishings.
  - Choose blinds that can be wiped down over curtains. If you choose curtains, select fabric ones that can be washed in 130° hot water regularly.
  - Vacuum furniture and mattresses weekly.
  - Use allergen-barrier mattress covers.
  - Wash throw blankets in 130° hot water.
- Wash all bedding weekly in 130° hot soapy water and dry on high heat. Replace pillows every two years. Use zippered allergen pillow protector covers.
- Leave your bed unmade to let it cool and air out. Warmth and moisture from your body encourage dust mite growth.
- Check your shower curtain for signs of mold/mildew and replace it, if necessary.
- Consider using a portable, room-sized air purifier.
- Keep windows closed during peak pollen season and when outdoor air pollution is high. Also, during peak pollen season, take your shoes off, change clothes upon coming in from the outdoors, and take a shower before bed.
- For seasonal allergies, begin taking antihistamines before your seasonal symptoms start.
- As much as possible, avoid harsh chemicals like bleach, and remove items from your home with strong scents like candles.
- Measure and control the humidity inside your home. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends the indoor humidity range to be between 30% to 50%.
- Improve airflow by leaving interior doors open and running exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens. Clean exhaust fan covers a few times per year.
- Consider using certified asthma and allergy friendly® products.

To learn more and to find certified asthma and allergy friendly® products, check out the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

*Information obtained from SSM Health and The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA)*