

Sports and asthma: Minnesota kids compete

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A new analysis by the Minnesota Department of Health finds that middle and high school students who have asthma are just as likely as their peers, who do not have asthma, to participate in sports.

With spring arriving and thousands of kids with asthma getting outside to play spring sports, the Minnesota Department of Health is reminding parents, coaches, and athletes to be aware of the signs of an asthma attack this May, which is Asthma Awareness Month, and as part of World Asthma Day, May 7.

May is also an important time to think about child and adult asthma as Minnesota enters one of its peak pollen seasons. Spring pollen is a major trigger of asthma. Other common triggers of asthma symptoms include dust, mold, air pollution, pet dander and respiratory infections. Symptoms of asthma may include wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness and cough, which can be worse at night or early in the morning.

"There's no reason that asthma should slow down young people or stop them from being physically active," said Commissioner of Health Dr. Ed Ehlinger. "However, physical activity can be a trigger for asthma attacks for some athletes so it's important for coaches to know the signs and symptoms of an asthma episode in order to respond appropriately. That way, young athletes with asthma can stay on the field and compete safely." It is also important that athletes have a current asthma action plan from their health care provider and a rescue inhaler immediately available, Ehlinger said.

MDH recently ran a new analysis of data from the 2010 Minnesota Student Survey and found that 71 percent of Minnesota youth in middle and high school with asthma compete in club, community and school sports teams compared to 70 percent of youth who don't have asthma. Among those who participate, 1 in 6 young athletes has been diagnosed with asthma at some point. This means three members on a team of 20 are likely to have a history of asthma.

To help coaches, the Minnesota Department of Health offers free, 25-minute online educational training called *The Coach's Asthma Clipboard Program*. The training is found at www.WinningWithAsthma.org

. Coaches who complete the training receive reward items, including a clipboard that details steps to take when an athlete is having an asthma attack. Coaches also receive a supplementary booklet that expands on program training components in addition to a certificate of completion, and other items.

About 7 percent, or 90,000, Minnesota youths have had an asthma diagnosis. Each year about 1,000 young people under the age of 18 are hospitalized because of asthma. Although asthma deaths among young people are relatively rare in Minnesota, between 2005 and 2010 there were 14 asthma-related deaths among Minnesotans under the age of 18.

The adult rate of asthma in Minnesota is 7.0 percent, which is lower than the national average of 9.1 percent. The same is true for the child asthma rate of 7.1 percent, which is lower than the U.S. rate of 8.8 percent. These rates mean that in Minnesota there are 300,000 adults and 90,000 children with asthma. In addition, the statewide asthma mortality rate increased between

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2008 and 2010. There were 52 asthma-related deaths in 2008 and 73 in 2010. Poorly controlled asthma, which can result in emergency room or hospitalization visits, is still a challenge for Minnesota. Minnesota saw 17,804 emergency room visits and 3,375 hospitalizations during 2011.

The MDH Asthma Program is working hard with a variety of Minnesota partners to improve asthma care in schools, clinics, home and work environments. MDH supports healthier homes for those with asthma through the development of local and statewide initiatives that increase asthma awareness through educational opportunities. MDH is working with local public health to improve asthma management and eliminate environmental triggers in the homes of children with asthma.

For more information, go to the MDH Asthma Program website at: www.health.state.mn.us/asthma

A new fact sheet about asthma in Minnesota is also available at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/Research.html

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