

Asthma - Reactive Airway Disease

Lung Infection Control

Respiratory Care Department

Respiratory infections frequently trigger severe episodes of asthma. Research indicates that these infections are most frequently produced by viruses, rather than bacteria. Antibiotics are of no benefit for viral infections and be of little value in an asthma episode. Bronchodilator medication, good hydration, and when indicated, corticosteroids are required to control an asthma episode triggered by viral infections. Therefore, a physician may not prescribe an antibiotic when a patient is having a respiratory infection and asthma unless s/he suspects a bacterial infection such as sinusitis or bronchitis. Asthma may also be triggered by an ear infection.

Note: Chronic sinusitis in childhood due to bacteria can be a very stubborn trigger for asthma. Antibiotic treatment for 10 days may not be effective. For these children, sinus x-rays are often required to diagnose the underlying condition. Antibiotic treatment for 3-6 weeks or longer may be needed to completely eradicate these infections.

Take Precautions:

Taking the following precautions can help you avoid illness:

- Wash your hands often, and keep them away from your face. Most germs are spread through hand-to-mouth contact.
- Get a flu shot every year. Ask your doctor about a pneumonia vaccination.
- Stay out of crowds, especially in the winter when more people have colds and flu.
- Exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet, and get enough sleep.
- Keep your lungs clear of mucus, which can trap germs.

When to Get Treatment

If you get sick, the sooner you seek treatment, the more likely you are to prevent damage to your airways. Call your doctor at the first signs of any of the following:

- A fever or chills
- Tightness in your chest that does not go away with your normal medications.
- Increased shortness of breath, wheezing, or coughing
- Increased mucus, blood in your mucus, or mucus that has an odor or is yellow or green
- An irregular heartbeat
- Swollen ankles

Talk with your doctor about what you should do if you're ill, and keep a list of your medications with you in case you get sick away from home.