

What do the updated asthma guidelines mean to me?



Your guide to the Australian
Asthma Handbook Version 2.0

Asthma
Australia

The Australian Asthma Handbook sets the best practice guidelines for primary healthcare professionals to diagnose and manage asthma.

If you have asthma, they essentially set the standard of medical care and treatments you receive in hospital, at your GP and at the pharmacy. These guidelines also set the pace at which asthma care, including treatment and support systems, evolve in Australia. While these guidelines do not close all the gaps, this update is a step towards achieving a more comprehensive model of care for 2.7 million Australians with asthma.

If you have asthma, you are empowered to use these guidelines to assist with your health care. Below are the key **changes** and points you or your carer need to know:

For everyone who has asthma



- **Your doctor and pharmacist should train you in the correct use of your asthma inhaler.** This will help ensure you're prescribed the right style of inhaler to suit you; and you are using it correctly to receive a proper dose of medication. Please ask for a demonstration, even if you think you know how to use your inhaler.



- **An Asthma Action Plan is a clinical standard and improves patient outcomes.** If you do not have an Asthma Action Plan, your GP should provide you with one. If your Asthma Action Plan is more than 6 months old, please seek a review from your GP or respiratory specialist.



- **If you present to hospital with acute asthma, you should receive a discharge plan (for children and adults) which is an interim Asthma Action Plan.** There are new checklists for discharge to transition you to primary care, including an appointment within 3 days in addition to a review of your asthma at 2-4 weeks. If this doesn't happen to you, book an appointment with your GP immediately.



- **Ask your doctor about the costs of your asthma medicines and how to minimise your costs.** There are a range of treatment options. Your doctor is obliged to work within your financial means to ensure you can access the appropriate medication.



- **Thunderstorm asthma advice is now blanket for everyone who may be at risk, including those who have allergies.** Advice is to avoid being outdoors before and during springtime thunderstorms; check pollen counts and avoid thunderstorms only on high pollen days. Pollen count links and apps are available on our website.

For Children with asthma

- **There are now age based recommendations**, providing a new reference figure on a stepped approach to adjusting asthma medication in children aged 1-5 years and 6 years and over. Please check with your GP that your child is receiving care consistent with the guidelines.
- **Ask for allergen avoidance advice if your child has allergic rhinitis (hay fever).** Discuss allergen immunotherapy as a strategy for asthma prevention and also ask about safe medication for managing allergic rhinitis in your child.
- **See your GP before your child returns to school each year.** Back to school asthma is a known and serious risk and is firmly set out in the updated guidelines.

For Adolescents with asthma

- **There are now separate recommendations for managing asthma in adolescents** including a focus on confidentiality. As a mid-teenager, from 14-16 years old, doctors will consult you alone, so you can talk in confidence about your asthma without your parent or carer present. If you feel more comfortable talking with your doctor alone, you have every right to request this.

For Severe Asthma

- **There are add on treatments now recommended in the guidelines for managing severe asthma**, including tritropium, oral corticosteroids, azithromycin, and monoclonal antibody therapy. Please check with your specialist.
- **There is additional advice for non-pharmacological strategies and general care to manage your severe asthma.** Please ask about these strategies with your specialist.

Changes Asthma Australia is pleased to see

As well as reflecting important clinical advancements over the past five years, we are pleased to note improved medical discharge protocols from hospital, including resources for an interim Asthma Action Plan and discharge checklist.

There are now improved guidelines and a focus on diagnosing asthma in children and adolescents separately as well as identifying risk factors for life-threatening asthma flare-ups.

We strongly welcome the shift towards a more patient centred approach. Highlights are encouraging GPs to talk with patients about the cost of medicine; recommending that inhaler technique is reviewed for individuals; and managing risk factors such as thunderstorm asthma (allergens) and back to school time asthma with more conscientious, proactive care.

Through our Asthma Helpline phone service, Asthma Australia has identified many of these updated changes as key issues for people with asthma.

Where to find the Australian Asthma Handbook version 2.0 & My Asthma Guide

The Australian Asthma Handbook and My Asthma Guide, is developed by the National Asthma Council Australia. **To download the updated versions please visit www.nationalasthma.org.au**