



Maryland Asthma Control Program Asthma-Friendly Schools Initiative

Asthma is a serious chronic lung disease caused by airway inflammation resulting in wheezing, chest tightness, coughing, and shortness of breath. Asthma is controllable with access to quality health care, appropriate medications, and avoidance of environmental triggers. Uncontrolled asthma leads to increased health care utilization and school absenteeism. Asthma affects persons of all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders; however, children, minorities, and those of lower socioeconomic status are more affected. In 2007, 8.9 percent of Maryland children and adolescents had asthma. Maryland School Health Services statistics indicate that asthma is the most common chronic condition in Maryland school children, affecting more than 60,000 students statewide during the 2006-2007 school year.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Maryland Asthma Control Program (MACP), in collaboration with an interagency team of State and Local school and health representatives, developed an Asthma-Friendly School Initiative (AFSI). An asthma-friendly school supports the health and academic success of students through maximizing asthma management and reducing environmental asthma triggers in the school environment. Becoming an asthma-friendly school is not an additional program for students with asthma, but rather an effort to coordinate policies and programs under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and No Child Left Behind to effectively support students with asthma. Current school health services standards and the Code of Maryland Regulations support many elements of an AFSI.

The hallmarks of an asthma-friendly school are: 1) Identifying and tracking students with asthma; 2) Maximizing asthma management through the use of asthma action plans and case management; 3) Coordination of asthma management with parents/guardians and health care providers; 4) Supportive policies regarding access to asthma medication; 5) Proactive maintenance of buildings and school facilities to reduce asthma triggers and improve indoor and outdoor air quality; and 6) Asthma education for students and staff.

To become an asthma-friendly school a coordinated collaborative approach is required. An interagency local and school specific partnership team is suggested to lead the planning effort. To facilitate your planning, the Maryland AFSI can:

1. Provide guidance to local school systems and local health departments to plan a local AFSI in their jurisdiction;
2. Facilitate access to training and technical assistance to local AFSI partnerships;
3. Provide technical assistance for the development of data and program evaluation tools and methodologies; and
4. Provide access to AFSI materials that can be used to promote the asthma-friendly schools concept and the Asthma-Friendly Schools designation.

An "Asthma-Friendly Schools Awards Program" allows individual schools to be recognized for their achievements in meeting the Asthma-Friendly Schools Designation Criteria. The awards program requires completion of a School Assessment Checklist and an Asthma Friendly Schools Award Designation Application Form. The Awardees will receive a plaque and a banner to display in the school. Planning resources can be found at http://fha.maryland.gov/mch/asthma_afsi_resources.cfm

For further information on how you can become an asthma-friendly school, please contact:

Rachel Hess-Mutinda, LGSW
Maryland Asthma Control Program Coordinator
Telephone: 410-767-2196
E-mail: RHessMutinda@dnhm.state.md.us