

Early Signs of an Asthma Episode

Students who have asthma often learn to identify their early warning signs—the physical changes that occur in the early stage of airway obstruction. These early warning signs usually happen long before more serious symptoms occur. Being aware of these early warning signs allows the student to take medication at a time when asthma is easiest to control. Teachers should encourage students to be aware of these early symptoms, and to take the proper action immediately.

Knowing the signs of a beginning episode will help you and other staff take appropriate measures to avoid a more serious medical emergency. There should be no delay once a student has notified the teacher of a possible problem.

A student may exhibit one or more of these signs during the initial phase of an asthma episode.

1. Changes in breathing may include:
 - coughing,
 - wheezing,
 - breathing through the mouth,
 - shortness of breath, and/or
 - rapid breathing.
2. Verbal Complaints. Often a student who is familiar with asthma will know that an episode is about to happen. The student might tell the teacher that:
 - the chest is tight,
 - the chest hurts,
 - he/she cannot catch a breath,
 - the mouth is dry,
 - the neck feels funny, and/or
 - a more general "I don't feel well."
3. Other signs may be:
 - an itchy chin or neck—some people may rub their chin or neck in response to this feeling, or
 - "clipped" speech—the student may speak in very short, choppy sentences.