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NEWS RELEASE

Managing Your Child's Asthma

Asthma (az-muh) is one of the most common health problems in New York State and the nation, especially among inner-city and preschool-aged children. Recently, the number of people with asthma has grown at such a rapid rate that it is called an epidemic.

"In New York State, asthma now affects more than 1.1 million adults and more than a quarter-million children," said the Otsego County Department of Health. "It is the fourth leading cause of disability among children under 18."

Parents need to know about this long-lasting lung condition. It's especially important to learn how to prevent and manage asthma attacks.

At certain times, asthma makes it hard to breathe. If your child has asthma, his or her airways get sore, swollen and very sensitive. They react strongly to things that your child is allergic to or finds irritating. When this happens less air goes into the lungs. An asthma attack is when someone with asthma wheezes (makes a whistling sound when breathing), coughs, has a tight chest, and has trouble breathing, especially at night and early morning.

Asthma can't be cured, but these attacks can be managed, allowing kids with asthma to lead active lives.

If your child has asthma, it is very important that you see a doctor to develop and stick to an asthma action plan for your child. This may include taking medicine.

It is also important that you do not smoke. Smoking will make your child's asthma worse. Help your child avoid contact with things that might cause an asthma attack such as tobacco smoke, cockroaches, dust, dust mites, pets, mold, and some chemicals. These items are called 'triggers' because they may start an attack. Triggers vary from person to person.

Even babies can have asthma. If your family has a history of allergies and/or asthma, your baby may be more likely to develop asthma. It may first show up as several days of wheezing after a cold, or a tight-sounding cough at night. If you notice your baby has wheezing, coughing, trouble breathing, or shortness of breath, take him or her to a doctor to be checked.

Sometimes you will need to see the doctor more than once to make sure that the wheezing is caused by asthma and not by congestion from a cold. If your doctor says your child has asthma, he or she will probably give you medicine to help keep your baby's airways open. Usually you are also told to reduce possible sources of allergies in your baby's environment. Some ways to do this are to get rid of items that collect dust and keep pets out of your baby's room.

When your child has asthma, it's important to have a regular pediatrician who can follow your child's progress and see how he or she reacts to different treatments.

For more information on living with asthma, call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov. The Department of Health web site also includes information about health insurance for you and your child.