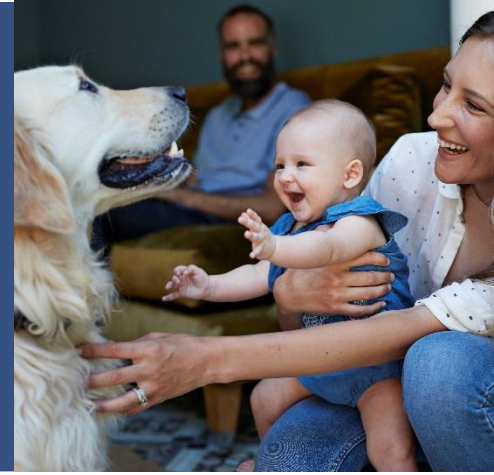


## JUNE PREVENTIVE HEALTH TOOLKIT

# Asthma and Allergies



June's focus is on asthma and allergies. In the United States, approximately 25 million people have asthma, and more than 100 million people have allergies. Asthma and allergy symptoms often ramp up during the warmer months so, now is a great time to learn more about these conditions. (Sources: [CDC](#), [AAFA](#))

Asthma and allergies are conditions that can occur at any age. Their underlying causes are largely unknown, but both tend to run in families. Neither are curable for most patients, but they can be controlled with proper prevention and treatment. If you have asthma or allergy symptoms, discuss them with your doctor. If your symptoms are severe, they may refer you to a specialist to help diagnose or manage your condition. Whatever your medical team looks like, work with them to create an asthma or allergy management plan. A management plan is one of the most important steps to help you feel better, keep you breathing well, and to avoid the need for emergency care.

Learn more with the activities in this toolkit:

- **Asthma vs allergies**
- **Control your asthma**
- **Healthier home checklist**

**Asthma is the most common chronic disease in children and allergies are the 6<sup>th</sup> most common cause of chronic illness overall.**

(Sources: [NIH](#), [CDC](#))

 **Questions?**

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# Health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in health between groups of people due to race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, economic status, where they live, disability, etc. Health disparities are a complicated and challenging problem around the world. The health of a community is shaped mostly by social factors. For example, having access to healthcare, a safe area to live, racial equity, healthy food, good education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all very important to overall health.

People who face health disparities are more likely to develop asthma and allergies. In the United States, asthma and some allergies disproportionately impact minority groups. Inequalities in housing, air quality, green spaces, and access to medical care often make managing these conditions more difficult. These barriers highlight the importance of creating equitable solutions for the management of asthma and allergies.

## Did you know?

- Non-Hispanic African American children have 2 to 3 times higher rates of asthma-related hospitalization and emergency department visits compared with non-Hispanic white children. (Source: [AAP](#))
- Hispanic children are 2 times more likely to visit an emergency department and 1.5 times more likely to die due to asthma when compared with non-Hispanic children. (Source: [AAP](#))
- Clinical studies have shown that low-income and minority groups are less likely to receive allergen immunotherapy (AIT), and Medicaid insurance is associated with more emergency room care for acute nasal symptoms compared to private insurance. (Source: [JACI](#))

For more information, please visit:

- [Current asthma demographics \(ALA\)](#)
- [Asthma disparities in America \(AAFA\)](#)
- [Health disparities \(AAN\)](#)

# Asthma vs. allergies

Test your knowledge. Read the statements below and guess which condition it applies to. Then learn more about these conditions on the educational chart on page 3. (Answers provided on page 3.)

	Asthma	Allergies
1. The most common condition affecting the human respiratory tract		
2. Common treatments include epinephrine and/or antihistamines		
3. Tobacco smoke is one of the most common triggers		
4. Common symptoms: wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness		
5. Occurs when a weak immune system responds to a foreign substance that's normally harmless		
6. Common symptoms: itchy/water eyes, sneezing, rashes, and wheezing		
7. A leading cause of kids missing school		
8. Most common triggers are pollen, milk, and nuts		
9. Can be controlled with regular use of anti-inflammatory medication		

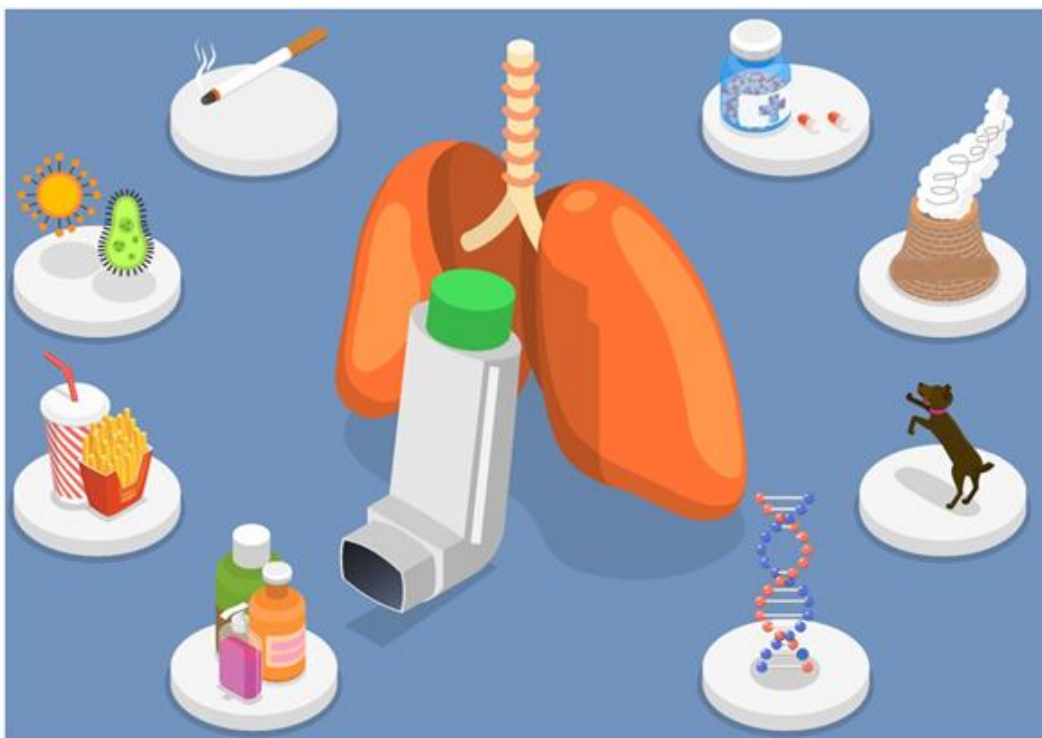
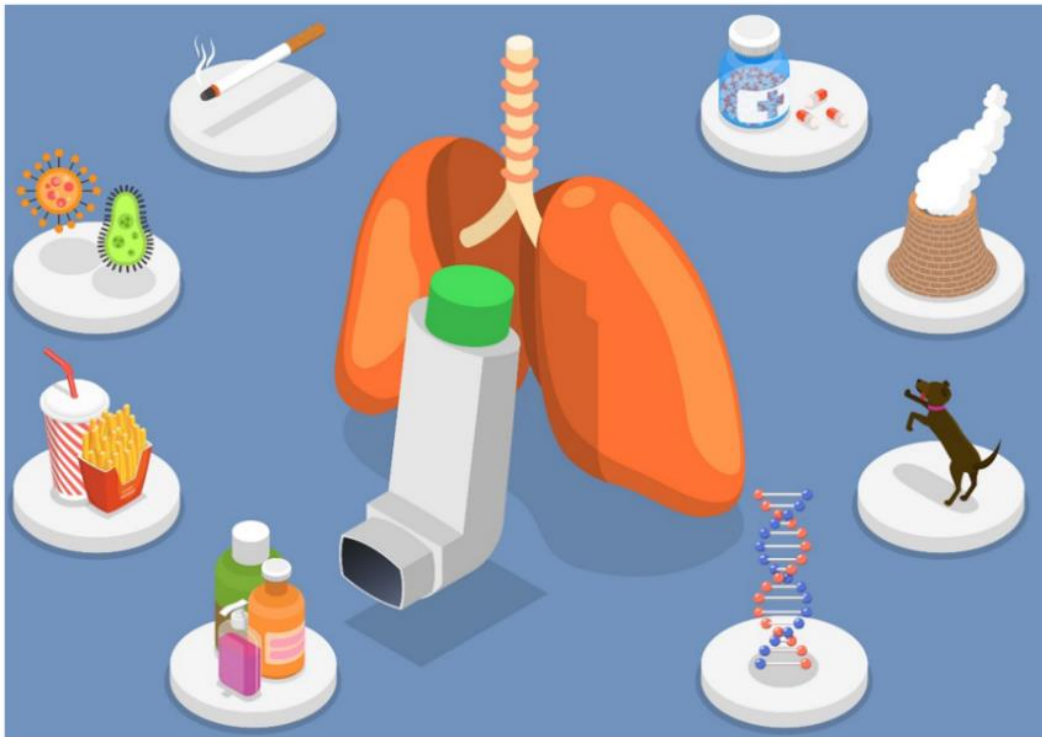
What's the difference between asthma and allergies? Even though they have some similarities, they are different conditions. Allergies can commonly, but not always, cause asthma symptoms. See the chart below to learn more.

	Asthma	Allergies
<b>Definition + diagnosis</b>	<p>A condition in which a person's airways become inflamed, become narrower due to swelling, and produce extra mucus—all of which makes it difficult to breathe.</p> <p>Diagnosed through physical exam and lung function tests (e.g., spirometry).</p>	<p>Abnormal and unusual response of the immune system to substances in the environment.</p> <p>Diagnosed through skin prick tests and blood tests.</p>
<b>Organs affected</b>	Lungs and airways.	Multiple organs such as the nose, lungs, throat, skin, lining of stomach, eyes and sinuses. Frequently allergies cause asthma symptoms.
<b>Common signs + symptoms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Coughing</li> <li>• Wheezing</li> <li>• Sensation of chest tightness</li> </ul>	<p>Symptoms vary widely and depend on how you're exposed. Some symptoms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itchy, watery eyes</li> <li>• Itchy and/or runny nose</li> <li>• Sneezing</li> <li>• Rashes</li> <li>• Hives (a rash with raised red patches)</li> <li>• Stomach cramps</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> <li>• Bloating</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Throat closing</li> <li>• Wheezing</li> </ul>
<b>Common causes</b> (can vary from person to person)	<p>Inflammation, mucus production, and airway narrowing can start for lots of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viral infections</li> <li>• Allergies</li> <li>• Emotional distress</li> <li>• Chemical irritants such as smoking or smoke exposure</li> <li>• Change in temperature or humidity</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> </ul>	<p>Many different allergens are responsible for allergic reactions and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollen</li> <li>• Dust</li> <li>• Food (e.g., fish, peanuts, shellfish, eggs)</li> <li>• Insect stings</li> <li>• Animal dander</li> <li>• Mold</li> <li>• Medications/drugs</li> <li>• Latex</li> </ul>

*Answer Key: Asthma vs. Allergies  
Asthma = 1, 3, 4, 7, and 9  
Allergies = 2, 5, 6, and 8*

# Spot the differences

Can you spot the 10 differences between the asthma and allergen irritants in these two pictures?  
(Answers provided on page 5.)



# Take action to control your asthma

When asthma causes your airways to narrow, you may experience shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing and coughing. Having an asthma action plan can help you keep your asthma under control. Work with your doctor to create the best asthma action plan for your health. Show them the zones below and ask about including each zone in your action plan.

## Know the signs

When you're in the **"green zone,"** you're doing well. You should:

- Have no coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, or difficulty breathing
- Be able to work, play, exercise, or do your everyday activities with no symptoms
- Have a peak-flow reading of 80% to 100% of your personal best

When you're in the **"yellow zone,"** you should take caution. This means you're:

- Coughing, wheezing, feeling tightness in your chest, or having difficulty breathing
- Able to do some, but not all, usual activities
- Waking up at night due to asthma
- Getting 50% to 79% of your personal best when you use your peak-flow meter

When you're in the **"red zone,"** contact your provider immediately.

*If you can't reach your provider, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911.*

This means you're:

- Very short of breath
- Having problems walking or talking due to asthma symptoms
- Not responding to quick-relief medicines
- Having symptoms that are the same or getting worse after 24 hours in the "yellow zone"
- Getting a peak-flow reading of less than 50% of your personal best



Answer Key: Spot the Differences

# Healthier home checklist

People spend more than 90% of their time indoors. Surprisingly, indoor air can be up to five times more polluted than outdoor air, and an estimated 3.2 million deaths are related to household air pollution annually.

(Sources: [EPA](#), [WHO](#)).

It's not easy to avoid problem-causing allergens entirely, but you can reduce their impact. This checklist offers some tips to improve the indoor air quality of your home.

- Replace the air filters in your HVAC system as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Clean your living space once a week to remove dust, pollen, mold, and animal dander.
- Select easy-to-clean home furnishings.
  - Choose blinds that can be wiped down instead of curtains. If you choose curtains, select fabric ones that can be washed in hot water regularly.
  - Vacuum furniture and mattresses weekly.
  - Use allergen-barrier mattress covers.
  - Wash throw blankets in hot water.
- Wash all bedding weekly in hot, soapy water and dry on high heat. Replace pillows every two years. Use zippered allergen pillow protectors.
- Leave your bed unmade to let it cool and air out. Warmth and moisture from your body encourage dust mite growth.
- Check your shower curtain for signs of mold/mildew and replace it, if necessary.
- Consider using a portable, room-sized air purifier.
- Keep windows closed during peak pollen season and when outdoor air pollution is high. Also, during peak pollen season, take your shoes off, change clothes upon coming in from the outdoors, and take a shower before bed.
- For seasonal allergies, begin taking antihistamines before your seasonal symptoms start.
- As much as possible, avoid harsh chemicals like bleach, and remove items from your home with strong scents like candles.
- Measure and control the humidity inside your home. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends the indoor humidity range to be between 30% to 50%.
- Improve airflow by leaving interior doors open and running exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens. Clean exhaust fan covers a few times per year.
- Consider using certified Asthma and Allergy Friendly® products.

To learn more and to find certified Asthma and Allergy Friendly® products, check out the [Certified Asthma and Allergy Friendly Products Guide](#).

# Resources

[What is asthma? \(ALA\)](#)

[Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America](#)

[Allergy and Asthma Network](#)

[Allergens and pollen \(CDC\)](#)

[Food allergies – what you need to know \(FDA\)](#)