

Winter 2023

Healthy Together

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Have Asthma? Keep Winter Weather From Stopping You Cold

Winter can be a tough season for people with asthma. Like other asthma triggers such as smoke or pollen, the cold, dry air that blows in with winter can cause your airways to narrow and get inflamed. This causes shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing.

You will likely notice this winter trigger most during outdoor physical activity. Breathing cold air in through your mouth when exercising may cause an asthma attack.

Plan Ahead

The first step in fighting back against the effects of cold weather on your asthma is to make sure your asthma is under control as winter arrives. Use medicine as directed by your health care provider. As much as possible, avoid the triggers that make your asthma worse.

If your asthma is under control, you should be able to do normal activities without symptoms. See your provider if you need more help managing asthma.

Stay Safe This Season

Here are some more tips to help you stay active in chilly weather:

- **Always have your emergency asthma inhaler with you when you go outdoors.** Bring it even if it is just to pick up the mail or walk the dog.
- **Dress for the weather.** Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose. This will help so that you are breathing warmer, moister air.
- **Stick to indoor activities during the winter months.**

Yoga, an indoor recreational sports league and indoor swimming are 3 great options. Do what you enjoy!

- **At home, check your indoor humidity levels.** Air that is too dry can dry out your nasal passages. Air that is too humid can lead to mold and dust mites. A good balance is between 35 to 50% relative humidity.

One final note: Wintertime illnesses like colds and flu can make asthma worse. To prevent them, wash your hands often, avoid close contact with those who are sick and get a flu shot.

**We are here to help
any day, anytime.
24/7 NURSE ADVICE LINE
1-800-562-4620
Call ANYTIME you
want to talk to
a nurse.**



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What You Need to Know About Monkeypox

For the past few years, COVID-19 has topped headlines. But now, health officials are tracking cases of a different disease: monkeypox. As you have likely heard on the news, cases have been showing up in growing numbers in the United States.

What is monkeypox and how does it spread?

Monkeypox is a disease caused by a virus of the same name. It is related to smallpox, and it first occurred in research monkeys. While the disease is not as serious as smallpox, it can be fatal in rare cases.

Monkeypox spreads in a few ways. These include close skin-to-skin contact or contact with an object or surface that someone with monkeypox touched or used.

What are the symptoms?

Typically, monkeypox starts with:

- Swollen lymph nodes (most often in the neck, chin, armpits or groin)
- Fever
- Chills
- Head, muscle and back aches
- Exhaustion

After a few days, infected people will get a rash with blisters on their hands

face, feet or genitals. The bumps typically rise, fill with a clear or yellowish fluid, then dry up and fall off.

If you have these signs, see your health care provider. Also, tell them if you have traveled recently or if you are a man who has intimate contact with other men. While risk is not limited to this group, many recent cases have spread among men in gay and bisexual communities.

How is it treated?

Many people with monkeypox simply need rest and fluids. Symptoms typically go away in 2 to 4 weeks.

Children and those with poor immune systems may get sicker. Rare complications include pneumonia, skin infections and eye infections. You might be prescribed eye drops, mouth rinses or antiviral medications.

Can you prevent it?

To prevent the spread of monkeypox, avoid infected people. If you take care of someone with symptoms, you should both wear masks. Also, ask them to cover up their rash with clothing.

Wash your hands with soap and water after handling items touched by someone with monkeypox. And if you have the disease, take steps to protect those around you.

Vaccines against smallpox can protect you against monkeypox, either before or after you have been exposed. There is also a newer vaccine that has been approved for preventing monkeypox. However, this shot may not be available everywhere yet. Check with your health care provider to learn more.



+ health briefs

Feel Less Anxious

Taking a 20-minute break may help ease anxiety. During that time, do something that makes you laugh or helps clear your mind. Chat with a funny friend or watch cute animal videos. Or try coloring! A geometric design may offer the most relief.



Let in Light

If you start feeling depressed when the days get shorter in winter, you might have SAD (seasonal affective disorder). Light therapy, which is exposure to a bright white light every day, may improve your mood. It can also help to be more active and social. Talk with a health care provider to learn more.



Call 988 for Help

If someone needs medical help, you know to call 911. Now there is also an easy number—988—for mental health support. It connects callers to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for confidential, 24/7 help. If you would rather type, you can also text to 988.



COVID-19 Corner

COVID-19: From Pandemic to Endemic

Over the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic has touched so many parts of our lives—from health habits to how we work and socialize. At this point, one thing is clear: COVID-19 is likely here to stay for a while. In fact, many experts have already begun to treat COVID-19 as an endemic rather than a pandemic. What does this mean?

Pandemic vs. Endemic

A pandemic is when an outbreak of a disease causes more than the expected number of cases in a small population and then spreads quickly over a large geographic area. It may cause widespread disruption, illness and hardship. Sound familiar?

A pandemic begins to shift to what is known as an endemic once the disease becomes more stable and can be better managed. The virus does not go away. But it is less of a burden on daily life.

There are a few signs that COVID-19 is now becoming endemic. The spread

has slowed as more people get vaccines or natural immunity (even temporarily). There are fewer cases and people in the hospital because of COVID-19. And our health system is less stressed.

Living With COVID-19

What can we expect from a COVID-19 endemic? As with the already endemic flu virus, it will still be possible to get sick from COVID-19. It may also still surge from time to time. These ups and downs are typical. But they do not need to greatly change how we live.

To protect yourself as we focus on living with COVID-19 long-term:

- Keep following guidance on vaccines and booster shots. A new booster shot more targeted to current strains is now available.
- Do rapid testing as needed to help lower the spread of the disease.
- Continue healthy habits like handwashing.
- Use extra precautions such as mask-wearing during outbreaks.

About COVID-19 Vaccines and Kids

Parents have spent the past 2-plus years trying to keep young children safe from COVID-19. Now they have a new tool. Two COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, are now approved for children 6 months and older.

Kids' doses are just the right size, smaller than those adults or teens receive. Based on clinical trial findings, the Pfizer vaccine is usually 3 doses, while the Moderna vaccine is usually given in 2.

Minor side effects may include a sore arm, aches and fever. But your little one should feel better within a day or two. Serious problems after a vaccine are rare.

Just like for grown-ups, COVID-19 vaccines help protect children from catching the disease. If your child does get sick, it is less likely to be severe. Once they are immunized, you can feel safer sending them to school, sports or other group gatherings.

Children who have already had COVID-19 should still get the vaccine. Talk with your child's pediatrician about the best timing. You can also ask them about any other questions or concerns.

Note: This COVID-19 information was current at the time of publication.

For the most up-to-date information, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.





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Call **1-800-562-4620** to discuss any of the topics in this newsletter or any other health issues. Visit our Website at **www.OHPCC.org**.

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Taming Prescription Medication Costs

About 1/3 of people ages 45 to 64 take 3 or more prescription medicines. The related drug costs can make a real dent in a person's pocketbook. In fact, some people may decide to stop filling their medicines because of money concerns.

That can be dangerous. Stopping a medicine or taking less than you are supposed to can harm your health—even if you feel OK. If you have ever been tempted to do this, here are 3 better ways to safely control costs:

1 Talk with your health care provider. They may be able to prescribe a generic or less costly medicine.

2 Compare prices. Check online or call local pharmacies to check the retail price of common medications before deciding where to fill your prescription.

3 Get help with medicine costs. Several programs can help cover the cost of medicine. These include:

- **Medicare Part D.** If you are covered by Medicare, you are eligible for prescription drug coverage. Call **1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)** or visit **www.medicare.gov/plan-compare**.
- **Medicare Extra Help Program.** If you already have Medicare Part D and your income is limited, you may qualify for this program. It helps with prescription drug copayments and Medicare premiums. For information, call Social Security at **1-800-772-1213**.
- **State Medicare Savings Program.** Some states offer

additional help with Medicare expenses. To learn more, call **1-800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227)** or visit **www.medicare.gov** and search "Medicare Savings Program."

- **Pharmacy assistance programs.** Many drug companies offer free or low-cost medicines. To find out if you qualify for help, call the PPA (Partnership for Prescription Assistance) at **1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669)** or visit **www.pparx.org**. The PPA's services are free and confidential.



Bottom line: If you are concerned about medicine costs, talk with your provider or pharmacist. Or contact the programs listed above. It is worth the effort to get extra help in keeping you healthy.