

What **health care providers** should know...

Facts about the Student Inhaler Law

Wisconsin Statute 118.291 allows students with asthma to carry and use metered dose and dry powder inhalers with written permission.

Why does Wisconsin have a student inhaler law?

- Asthma is a life-threatening disease.
- An asthma attack requires immediate treatment with prescribed rescue medication.
- There may not be time to access medication stored in a central, not easily accessible location if an asthma attack occurs on the playground, in the gymnasium, on the school bus, on a field trip or in the classroom.

Overview of the law

- A child may carry inhaled asthma medication with him/her at school (locker, pocket, backpack, etc.).
- Inhaled asthma medications do not need to be locked away in a central location if the parent/guardian and the physician provide the school with written permission.
- The school cannot enforce a policy that contradicts this law.

What are the parents' concerns?

- Student may not have immediate access to life-saving medication.
- No written asthma action plan at school or if one exists, not shared with all personnel.
- Physicians write prescription for only one inhaler.
- Frustration with school bureaucracy.
- Medication will become lost or stolen.
- **Other questions concerning the protection of the child's health and safety:**
 - Is school staff knowledgeable about asthma and the proper administration of asthma medications?
 - Will someone be looking out for students in the classroom, on the playground, in the gymnasium or on a field trip?
 - Can staff identify and respond appropriately to an asthma emergency?
 - Will staff accommodate students' special health care needs?
 - Will students be excluded from activities or conversely, be asked to do too much?
 - Will students be labeled or "singled out" by staff and other students?

What are the schools' concerns?

- **Student's ability to responsibly carry and self-administer medication:**
 - Will student consistently carry medication particularly when exercising?
 - Will student dismiss or exaggerate asthma?
 - Will student misuse or abuse asthma medication?
- **Risk management issues related to prescription medication and treatment:**
 - Is the medication properly labeled?
 - Does staff have adequate knowledge about asthma and its life-threatening risks?
 - Can staff properly administer asthma medication?
- Insufficient time, staff, resources and knowledge to provide health care.
- Misconceptions about the difference between inhalers and inhalants.
- Parents not regularly communicating students' asthma-related needs.
- Parents' unrealistic demands or expectations.
- Privacy issues related to sharing student health information with other staff.

What can health care providers do?

Contact the American Lung Association of Wisconsin to receive information on Wisconsin Statute 118.291 and resources for creating an asthma action plan.

- Inform parents about the law.
- Educate the patient and parents about asthma and the proper techniques for administering medication.
- Assess the patient's ability to self-administer the medication.
- Discuss the patient's maturity level to handle this responsibility.
- Advocate for the patient - sometimes this means allowing the child to carry the inhaler, sometimes not.
- Encourage parents to meet with school personnel.
- Create an asthma action plan for the patient. Include signs, symptoms, needs, action steps and comments.
- Prescribe an adequate number of inhalers to ensure the patient has medication at home, at school and at extracurricular activities.
- Address school medication consent forms during clinic office visit.
- Avoid "taking sides." Help find solutions.
- Refer the patient's parents and school personnel to the Lung Association for childhood asthma information and resources.

Resources

American Lung Association of Wisconsin

www.lungusa.org/wisconsin • 800.LUNG.USA/(586.4872)

Department of Health and Family Services • www.dhfs.state.wi.us

Department of Public Instruction • www.dpi.state.wi.us

Wisconsin State Legislature • www.legis.state.wi.us