

Managing Childhood Asthma: Specialty Physicians Collaborate to Provide Treatment



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For the parents of children with asthma, the possibility of a trip to the emergency room with a child struggling to breathe is a real fear. Nearly five million children in the United States suffer from asthma, a disease in which an inflammatory process thickens and narrows the small airways. It is the leading cause of chronic illness in children and the number one reason for the hospitalization of children. Asthma's prevalence is on the rise, but thanks to the development of new medications and innovative ways to administer them, doctors now can often break an asthmatic attack more quickly and effectively.

To treat attacks, emergency physicians rely on an array of

medications, some of which have become more commonly used with children. These can be administered, individually or in combination, more quickly and efficiently in a variety of ways. These include orally, by inhaler, by nebulizer (a compressed air generator that delivers a medicinal mist), by injection, or intravenously into the vein.

Sometimes, children may be admitted to the hospital, ideally to a specialized pediatric unit. In these cases, the emergency physician will work closely with the physicians on the unit to make the continuum of care seamless. Most children admitted to the hospital require steroids—some of the most potent anti-inflammatory agents available. Today, many steroids can be administered orally, rather than intravenously, making treatment less painful. The availability of better medications and easier treatments results in better care for our young patients.

At Bryn Mawr Hospital, emergency physicians and hospital pediatricians work with a child's primary care physician to educate patients and

their families about the need for an asthma action plan. This includes avoiding triggers and using controller and reliever medications appropriately. Our hope is that by following a specific treatment plan, children will have fewer and less serious episodes of illness, and fewer emergencies and hospitalizations.

The Bryn Mawr Hospital/duPont Children's Health Program offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient pediatric care to treat area children. This partnership brings duPont Children's Hospital medical and surgical specialists together with Main Line Health's pediatricians and emergency physicians, to treat children in Bryn Mawr's inpatient pediatric unit and emergency room. Pediatric hospitalists, physicians who specialize in hospital care, and pediatric nurses provide 24-hour, seven day a week medical care on the unit.

For more information, call **1-866-CALL-MLH**, or visit us online at www.mainlinehealth.org.

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