

Older Adults* and Asthma

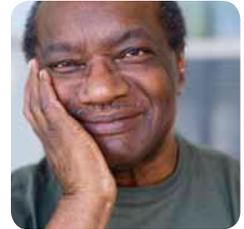
IN NORTH CAROLINA

What is Asthma?

- Asthma is a chronic (long-term) lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways.¹
- Common signs and symptoms of asthma may include wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe), chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing.
- For people with asthma, contact with allergens or asthma triggers (like pollen, mold, animal dander, dust mites), secondhand tobacco smoke, air pollution, occupational hazards, exercise, and airway infections may make asthma symptoms worse. When asthma symptoms get intense and/or when there are additional symptoms, an asthma attack may occur.
- Severe asthma attacks may require emergency care, and they can cause death.

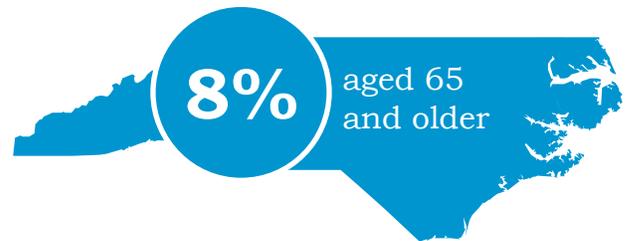


*Age 65 and older



Why is asthma an important health issue for older adults?

- In 2011, approximately 8% of North Carolinians aged 65 and older reported having current asthma.²



- Asthma in older patients is often under-diagnosed due to respiratory symptoms similar to those found in persons with COPD, lung cancer, pulmonary infection, and chronic bronchitis.³ This misdiagnosis can cause important and serious health issues, increasing the time it takes to get asthma appropriately under control.

In 2011, nearly **1 in 13**
older adults*
in North Carolina reported
having current asthma.²

*Age 65 and older.



What can you do to control your asthma?⁴⁻⁶

- Visit your doctor every six months, even if you think your asthma is under control.
- Get a written asthma action plan from your doctor. Make sure you understand it and have it updated at least every year. If you are the caregiver of an older adult, be sure you understand the asthma action plan completely.
- Make sure you always have access to your asthma medicines and use them correctly.
- Always use a holding chamber (or spacer) with your metered dose inhaler.
- Know what triggers your asthma and how to avoid conditions that may trigger an attack.
- Ask your doctor about tests to determine if you have allergies to specific triggers.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke (secondhand smoke).
- Ask your doctor about testing your lung function (spirometry) at least every 1-2 years.
- Be sure you get a flu shot every year.

Where can I find more information about asthma?

- North Carolina Asthma Program:
www.asthma.ncdhhs.gov
or call (919) 707-5213
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/asthma
- National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute:
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/
- American Lung Association:
www.lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/
- Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov/iaq/iaqhouse.html

SOURCES:

- ¹ National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. What is Asthma? (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/>). Accessed June 27, 2013.
- ² North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (2011)
- ³ Braman SS and Hanania NA. Asthma in Older Adults. *Clinics in Chest Medicine*. 2007;28(4):685-702.
- ⁴ National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. So You Have Asthma (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/asthma/have_asthma.pdf). Accessed October 24, 2012.
- ⁵ American Lung Association. Taking Control of Asthma (<http://www.lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/taking-control-of-asthma/>). Accessed October 22, 2012.
- ⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Asthma: Flu Shots – Get Vaccinated (<http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/flu.html>). Accessed October 22, 2012.



State of North Carolina | Pat McCrory, Governor
Department of Health and Human Services | Aldona Z. Wos, M.D., Secretary
Division of Public Health | www.ncdhhs.gov
N.C. DHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. Rev. 4/14