

# Holiday Health Hints

## Happy Lungs Make Healthy Holidays

(NAPSA)—Most children love the holidays. It's a time for winter break, family gatherings, festive decorations and, of course, playing in the snow. However, for the more than 6 million children with asthma, many of these holiday joys could trigger asthma symptoms. This time of year, asthma irritants are found inside and outside the home.

"As the weather gets colder, there are challenges for children with asthma. Breathing in cold air can provoke asthma symptoms, so make sure to cover your child's nose and mouth while he or she is outside," said Derek K. Johnson, pediatric allergy and immunology specialist, Fair Oaks Medical Center, Fairfax, Va. "In addition, the increased exposure to viruses and upper respiratory infections at this time of year can also trigger a child's asthma."

While the cold could be a problem outside during the holidays, there are even more asthma triggers inside. For families whose traditions include trimming a real Christmas tree, it is recommended to dry out the tree and clean its trunk before bringing it in the house. This will help limit reproducing mold spores that can cause asthma symptoms. If your family enjoys an artificial tree, clean it properly, since dust that accumulates on stored trees can irritate asthma. Also, avoid those artificial trees garnished with spray-on snow. Artificial snow on trees, windows or other surfaces can irritate the lungs. Such additions, including pine-scented sprays or oils, can also trigger a child's asthma symptoms.



**Candles and other seasonal decorations may trigger allergy symptoms in children with asthma.**

Additionally, holiday decorations are often kept in attics or closets where dust and mold can accumulate over time. Before dressing your home, clean all your decorations thoroughly. When it's time to put them away, seal them in plastic bags and store in airtight containers or clean boxes.

A burning fireplace and freshly lit candles are picture perfect against a snowy night; however, they could trigger your child's asthma. Limit or avoid the number of scented candles, potpourri and plant arrangements in your home. Also, correctly vent fumes from the fireplace, keep firewood outside the home and consider having the chimney cleaned before use. Families may also want to use glass doors on the fireplace since they will limit smoke escaping into the room.

Remember, too, that the holidays often mean lots of travel, so keep track of your child's triggers when visiting family and friends. Dust mites can be especially troublesome in a new environment, so consider packing your child's own pillow and bedding, or at least

pack your child's protective allergenproof pillowcase. Also, pack your medication in a carry-on or easily accessible bag so it's readily available.

Children with asthma can have happy and healthy holidays, but the key to asthma management is control. In addition to knowing and avoiding your child's holiday asthma triggers, the best way to prevent symptoms that could lead to an attack is to control the condition all year round.

"Work with your child's physician to design an asthma management strategy that may include the regular use of a controller medication, such as inhaled corticosteroids. For children under the age of 8 years, depending on the specific medicine used, the medicine may be easily and effectively administered with a nebulizer," said Dr. Johnson. "Controlling your child's asthma proactively and throughout the entire year will help make the holidays as symptom free as possible."

Asthma can be difficult to diagnose, especially in children younger than 5 years old. Regular physical checkups that include testing lung function and for allergies can help your child's doctor make the right diagnosis. Symptoms of asthma include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing and colds that last more than 10 days.

Evidence suggests that asthma is underdiagnosed. If you think your child may have asthma, it's important to see your pediatrician for a proper diagnosis.

Log on to [www.EVERYDAYKIDZ.com](http://www.EVERYDAYKIDZ.com) for more information on pediatric asthma.