



St John

First aid fact sheet

Asthma emergency



An asthma emergency is potentially life-threatening.

Most people who suffer asthma attacks are aware of their asthma and should have an action plan and medication. They may wear a medical alert device.

In an emergency, or if a patient does not have their own reliever, use another person's reliever (if permitted under local state or territory regulations), or one from a first aid kit.

If the patient is having difficulty breathing but has not previously had an asthma attack, follow **WHAT TO DO**

Signs and symptoms

Mild to moderate asthma attack

- increasingly soft to loud wheeze
- persistent cough
- minor to obvious difficulty breathing

Asthma emergency

- symptoms get worse very quickly
- little or no relief from inhaler
- severe shortness of breath, focused only on breathing
- unable to speak normally
- pallor, sweating
- progressively more anxious, subdued or panicky
- blue lips, face, earlobes, fingernails
- loss of consciousness

What to do

- 1 Follow DRSABCD.
- 2 Help the patient to sit down in a comfortable position.
- 3 Reassure and stay with the patient.
- 4 If requested, help the patient to follow their action plan.

How to give medication (4:4:4)

Use a spacer if available.

- 1 Give 4 separate puffs of blue/grey reliever puffer:
 - shake the inhaler
 - give 1 puff
 - take 4 breaths
 - repeat until 4 puffs have been given.
- 2 Wait 4 minutes
- 3 If there is no improvement, give 4 more separate puffs of blue/grey reliever as above.
- 4 If the patient still cannot breath normally, **call triple zero (000)** for an ambulance.
- 5 Keep giving 4 puffs every 4 minutes (as above) until medical aid arrives.

In a medical emergency call Triple Zero (000)

DRSABCD Danger ▶ Response ▶ Send for help ▶ Airway ▶ Breathing ▶ CPR ▶ Defibrillation

You could save a life with first aid training • www.stjohn.org.au • 1300 360 455