A Spotlight on asthma and allergy

Between one third and one half of the Australian population will be affected by a form of allergy at some stage in their life. There are many different causes of allergic reactions, with symptoms varying from mild to potentially life threatening.

Allergy occurs when a person’s immune system reacts negatively to a particular substance in their environment that is harmless to most people. These substances, known as allergens, are most commonly house dust mites, pollens, pet hairs, moulds, foods and some medicines.

Why do only some people develop allergy?
There is a genetic (inherited) tendency to develop allergic disease and when people with this tendency are exposed to specific allergens they can develop a reaction that leads to redness and swelling in the affected area. The areas most commonly affected are the skin, the airways in the lung, the nose and/or the eyes. These reactions are then referred to as:

- Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) in nose/eyes
- Eczema (hives and itchiness) in the skin
- Asthma in the lungs

Everyone reacts differently, and a substance that is an allergen for one person may not be for another. **Note:** The likelihood of developing allergies increases if other family members suffer from allergy or asthma.

Effects of allergens in the lungs
When you breathe in an allergen, the lining of the air passages in the lungs become swollen and makes breathing difficult. Therefore asthma symptoms can occur during an allergic reaction.

Most people with asthma have a genetic tendency to develop allergic diseases. There is a close link between asthma and hay fever. If a person’s hay fever is poorly controlled, it can be harder to manage their asthma also. Although not all asthma is caused by allergy, in many cases allergy does play a part. For further information, a useful website is the Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)
Asthma and allergy friendly gardens

Planting a wheeze and sneeze free garden can improve the health and wellbeing of people affected by asthma in an education setting.

Between August and March there is an increased amount of pollen in the air. For some of the two million Australians who have asthma and/or allergies, being outside during this time and close to plants is often accompanied by symptoms of sneezing, runny or blocked noses, watery and itchy eyes and sometimes extreme fatigue.

For many people with asthma, air borne pollen can trigger an asthma attack and make life pretty uncomfortable. Plants can also trigger or worsen symptoms because they have a strong irritating perfume. Some plants may commonly produce an irritating skin rash if touched.

Choosing asthma and allergy friendly plants can help improve students and staff wellbeing. The first step would be to look at the types of plants that are planted in the setting. Some, including grasses, can be pruned or cut early before they begin to release pollen. A nursery should be able to advise you on which plants and trees are high in pollen or heavily scented.

Following are some examples of asthma friendly plants and ones to avoid when designing an asthma friendly garden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grasses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Buffalo, Kangaroo (A) Greenless Couch, Rice or Weeping Grass (A)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Flowers</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Banksia Rose (S), Bulbs (e.g. daffodils), Climbing Rose (S), Columbine, Foxglove, Glossy Abelia (S), Impatiens, Larkspur, Nasturtium, Petunia, Snapdragon, Verbena</td>
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<tr>
<td>✗ Asteraceae family of daisies including: Chrysanthemums, Calendulas, Marigolds</td>
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<th>Shrubs</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Azalea, Banksia Species (A), California Lilac, Callistemon (A), Dog Rose, Escallonia, Flax, Gardenia (S), Kunzea (A), Lavender (S), Melaleuca (A), Plumbago, Rose species, Silky Tea Tree (A), Twiggy Heath (A), Westringia (A), Yucca</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Bay Laurel, Citrus species (A) Coastal Banksia (A), Flowering Crab Apple, Lillypilly (A), Male Gingko biloba, Old Man Banksia (A), Paperbark (A), Silky Oak (A), Paperbark (A), Scribbly Gum (A), Tupelo, Willow Myrtle (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Alder, Ash, Birch, Box Hedges, Cypress family of trees, Elm, Hazel, Liquidambar, Maple, Mulberry, Oliver, Orchid Tree, Pine family of trees, Platanus Xhybrida (Plane Tree), Walnut, White Cedar, Willow, She-Oak (male only)</td>
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<th>Other plants</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Weeds such as Plantain (Plantago) and Asthma Weed (Pellitory). Although not causing asthma, some of these plants may cause a rash if touched: Clematis, Common Ivy, English Ivy, Some Grevilleas (A), Poinsettia, Poyanthus, Primrose, Primula, Rhus Tree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
- (A) = Australian native
- (S) = scented

For a full list of plants to use and avoid, order the Asthma & Allergy Friendly Gardens Brochure by calling 1800 645 130 or download.
Children’s Writing Competition

Did you know
• 70% of children have taken time off school in the past year due to asthma
• asthma is a leading reason for school absenteeism in Australia

To help raise awareness about asthma and what it’s like to be unwell, Asthma Foundation NSW is inviting primary school children to get creative and write a short story with the following title;

Stuck At Home in my PJs

Stories should be about what it’s like to be stuck at home in your pyjamas when you are unwell with asthma or any other illness. Stories should be no longer than 200 words.

All competition entrants will receive a certificate of participation and be invited to attend a morning tea with Australian children’s author, Libby Gleeson at Eden Gardens during September 2011.

Winning entries will;
• Have their story published on Asthma Foundation NSW’s website
• Receive a signed book by Libby Gleeson
• Be invited to read their story at Eden Gardens morning tea where they will meet Libby Gleeson and hear her read from one of her books

The school that submits the most entries (per student population) will receive a signed Libby Gleeson book pack for their library and a plant for their school garden.

Entries must include name, age, school, class, contact phone number. Closing Date for entries: Friday 19 August 2011

Entries can be emailed or posted to: ljacka@asthmafoundation.org.au

Children’s Writing Competition
Asthma Foundation NSW
Level 3, 486 Pacific Highway
St Leonards NSW 2065

Asthma training in schools and preschools across Australia

The take up of asthma training in Australian education facilities continues to grow, with 61.5% of schools and 26.5% of preschools with trained staff at 30 June 2011 (the provision of preschool training commenced in Nov 2009).

Our new training promotion trifold highlights issues and facts about students and asthma, also providing Asthma Friendly checklists for your facility and for you as a staff member.

Asthma First Aid

1. If the person is upright — Sit the person down immediately (DIAL 000)
2. Give medication — Take the blue reliever puffer* — Shake the blue reliever puffer*
— Use a spacer if you have one — Give 4 separate puffs
— Wait 4 minutes while you wait
— Be calm and reassuring

If there is no improvement, repeat step 2

3. Watch the person — Keep going for 4 minutes while you wait for emergency assistance
— Take 4 breaths from the spacer
— If the person’s asthma suddenly becomes worse
— Call emergency assistance immediately (DIAL 000) — If the person’s asthma
— If there’s no obvious improvement, repeat step 2
— Give 4 separate puffs
— If the person’s asthma suddenly becomes worse

To find out more contact your local Asthma Foundation
 Resolve 1800 645 130
 asthmaaustralia.org.au

Supported by the Australian Government

www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

Term Three 2011