

# Asthma Exacerbations: Recognition and Management

## About Asthma Attacks



- Asthma is characterised by **day-to-day variation in symptoms**
- When a person's symptoms **progressively worsen** over time and lung function decreases, this is called an asthma attack, exacerbation or flare-up.
- Worsening may occur quickly (over minutes or hours) but more often over several days or even weeks.

## Triggers

- viral or bacterial infection
- allergen exposure
- occupational sensitizers
- stress
- poor adherence to inhaled preventer therapy



Attacks can occur in people with allergic rhinitis - with or without a history of asthma - who are sensitized to rye grass pollen, during a 'thunderstorm asthma' event

## Maternal risk factors



Moderate / severe asthma



Cigarette smoking



Older age



Obesity



Multiparity



Depression / anxiety

Management of exacerbations of asthma in pregnancy should be the same as for other adults, including the use of oral corticosteroids if needed

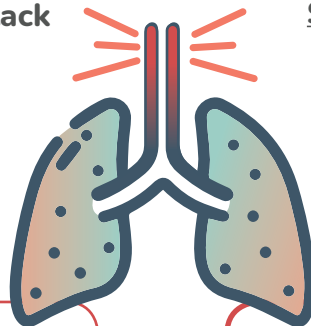
## Signs and Symptoms of an Asthma Attack

### The first signs of an asthma attack

- Difficulty breathing
- Inability to speak full sentences
- Cough or wheeze
- Reduced response to reliever medications



**Commence Asthma First Aid – Written Asthma Action Plan**  
**Call Ambulance on Triple Zero (000) if no improvement**



### Severe / life threatening signs

- Inability to speak
- Confusion and exhaustion
- Chest pain or tightness
- Tugging in of skin between the ribs and at the base of the neck
- Severe hypoxia
- Unconsciousness



**Call Ambulance on Triple Zero (000)**  
**Commence Asthma First Aid – Written Asthma Action Plan**

Asthma attacks can be quite frightening and should be treated seriously, by immediately taking **reliever medications**.

A **written asthma action plan** should include details on actions to take during an asthma attack and when to go to the hospital.

An asthma attack should prompt a **full review** of an individual's asthma management plan and medication.

## ASTHMA FIRST AID ADVICE

**Asthma Australia Website:**  
<https://asthma.org.au/treatment-diagnosis/asthma-first-aid/>

