

Kids and Asthma

DIAGNOSING ASTHMA

There's no single test for asthma, so it can be hard to diagnose the condition in a young child, says Dr. Galant, CHOC's Asthma, Allergy and Immunology specialist, noting that symptoms are sometimes mistaken for another illness. "The most important diagnostic findings include a chronic or intermittent cough that comes on in the middle of the night and after exercise," Dr. Galant says. "These kids also have wheezing and they respond to a bronchodilator, which opens the airways and stops the symptoms." In addition, children with asthma often have allergies, eczema or a family history of asthma, says Dr. Galant.

TREATMENT ACTION PLAN

Effective treatment requires a comprehensive approach and it's best to have a written treatment action plan, Dr. Galant says. Treatment can include regular medications and regular checks for lung and breathing function, as well as written instructions for when the child needs "rescue" medications and when to call the doctor. "We want to have few symptoms, no hospitalizations or emergency room visits and little use of the bronchodilator," says Dr. Galant. Highly allergic patients may also benefit from allergy shots to help reduce sensitivity to allergens.

AVOIDING ASTHMA TRIGGERS

Since asthma is often due to an allergic response, children with asthma should also be tested for allergies to help identify allergens that can trigger an asthma attack, says Dr. Galant. "There are allergens and non-allergen

triggers. Children can be allergic to foods as well as indoor allergens like dust, and cats. Nonallergic triggers include the common cold virus and environmental tobacco smoke," he says. Knowing a child's allergic triggers can help the family make changes at home to minimize the child's exposure to allergens and avoid asthma triggers.

COULD MY CHILD HAVE ASTHMA?

Your child should be checked for asthma if he or she experiences the following symptoms:

- Chronic or persistent coughing at night
- Coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath during or after exercise
- Wheezing

FAST FACTS

- Approximate number of children in the United States who die from asthma each year: 200
- Percentage of children nationwide with asthma: 10 – 12 %
- Percentage of underserved, inner-city elementary school-aged children in Orange County with asthma: 20 – 30 %