

# Achieve

▶ YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH ASTHMA

## A New Future With Asthma Starts Here



Welcome to the AvMed Disease Management Program's new newsletter, *Achieve*. We've designed it specifically for our Members who are living with asthma, and our goal is simple: to bring you expert-approved strategies that help you not only manage your condition, but also help you achieve your optimal health.

Each quarterly issue will deliver condition-specific articles with plenty of support for the rest of your life, from eating well, to moving more, to reducing stress.

And no matter where you are in your asthma journey, AvMed's Disease Management team — staffed with registered nurses, care advocates and a dietitian — can

guide you every step of the way. Whether you need help making doctor's appointments, managing your medications or finding local resources, your care team is just a phone call or email away.

To speak with a Case Manager, please call **1-833-609-0735** or email us at **DM@avmed.org**. We are honored to be your partner in health care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bonnell".

**Robert Bonnell, M.D.**  
**AvMed Medical Director**

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# What People With Asthma Need to Know About Cold and Flu Season

Don't let dipping temperatures and germmy surfaces keep you out of commission this season.



**A** cold-weather virus can take anyone out of commission for a few days. But for someone with asthma, a respiratory virus can raise the risk of infection or more lung damage, says Frederick D. Troncales, M.D., a pulmonologist at Franciscan Pulmonary Associates-Burien in Washington state.

To lower your chances of catching a cold, flu or even COVID-19, put these expert-backed tips to work in your life. Plus, learn which steps to take if — despite your best efforts — a virus does hit.

## Practice Prevention Habits

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that you

can avoid even the nastiest viruses with the right steps. This cold and flu season, flex these healthy habits even harder:

**Wash your hands.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers good old-fashioned handwashing to be one of the best ways to keep yourself from getting sick. Research backs that up. One study found that in general, office workers face a 40% to 90% chance of catching a virus.

But when they followed a strict clean-hands protocol, that risk dropped below 10%.

Unfortunately, most people don't scrub long enough to get the full power of soap and water, says Michael W. Sims, M.D., an assistant professor of clinical medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

You should wash your hands for a full 20 seconds (think: two rounds of humming "Happy Birthday to You"). And make sure to wash your entire hand, including between your fingers and the backs of your hands, the CDC says.

**Keep your distance.** Close contact is a common way that viruses spread. Stay away from crowds when possible. And keep some space between you and others when you're face-to-face. Social distancing works for preventing more than just the COVID-19 virus!

**Get enough sleep.** When you're well rested, your immune system is better able to fight off infectious invaders such as cold and flu viruses. One study found that people who sleep less than six hours a night are four times as likely to get colds as those who snooze seven hours or more.

**We're Here for You**  
Your Case Manager can connect you to the resources you need.  
**Just call 1-833-609-0735.**

## Ask the Asthma Doctor

**Stay active.** People who exercise moderately are a third as likely to catch a cold as those who don't exercise, according to research in *The American Journal of Medicine*. The researchers believe that exercise helps raise levels of white blood cells and proteins that fight off germs.

**Eat right and drink up.** Eating healthy foods that are high in vitamins and minerals can help keep your immune system humming. So eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. Hydration matters too. It helps keep the mucous membranes that line your nose and airways moist. That moisture traps invaders to pass them out of your body.

**Wear your mask.** Experts don't yet agree on how effective face coverings are against spreading the flu. But they can help, especially when done in combination with other practices like hand-washing after touching your nose or mouth. Until the COVID-19 pandemic is over, high-risk people may wish to mask up in indoor public places or gatherings and crowded areas even after they're vaccinated. The CDC currently recommends talking to your health care provider about wearing a mask to lower your risk.

## Stay Up to Date With Vaccines

There's no vaccine for the common cold (yet!). But there are vaccines that can effectively protect you from other viruses that could raise your risk of asthma complications.

**Pneumonia.** People with certain lung conditions such as asthma may be at higher risk of pneumonia. We encourage you to talk to your health care provider about when a pneumonia vaccine would be right for you.

**Influenza.** The CDC estimates that the flu vaccine prevents millions of illnesses and hospitalizations each year. And one study found that even for those who did get sick, adults who were vaccinated were 59% less likely to be admitted to the ICU than those who weren't vaccinated.

**COVID-19.** This vaccine can help you safely avoid this illness and greatly lower your risk of severe symptoms if you do get the virus. Even if you've already received your primary vaccines, schedule an appointment to get your booster.

## Make a Sick-Day Plan

Despite your best efforts, the cold or flu may still strike. That's why it's important to talk to your doctor so you understand how to manage your symptoms.

For instance, some over-the-counter cold and flu medications, such as aspirin or NSAIDs, may make certain people more prone to an asthma attack. Your doctor should be able to share which medications, if any, can safely help ease your symptoms.

They may also suggest having an extra asthma inhaler or other medicine on hand. Most important, you'll want to know when it's time to seek help.

Common warning signs your doctor may tell you to watch for include trouble breathing, constant chest pain and severe muscle pain. There may be others your care team wants you to monitor as well — so be sure to talk to them about it so you'll be ready to take action, if necessary.

## Q Is it true that children can outgrow asthma?

**A** Not exactly. For some kids, symptoms may go away forever; for others they can reappear years later. "The better explanation is that asthma can go into remission," says Theresa Guilbert, M.D., an asthma specialist and spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

A 2018 study showed that children who had severe asthma as kids were more likely to still have it as adults. But kids with better lung function scores often saw their symptoms decline by the time they became young adults.

"I tell my patients that asthma is a chronic disease and they're



likely to have symptoms for a while," says Dr. Guilbert.

"How long depends on many things," says Dr. Guilbert. "Kids who have a strong family history of allergic disease or who develop allergies early in life have a higher chance of still having asthma when they get older. If kids don't have those risk factors, they have a good chance of outgrowing it."

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# The Right Care at the Right Time

When you need quick care, these  
AvMed services will be standing by.

**Access  
Your  
Account  
24/7**

Register or log in  
at **AvMed.org**

**Call Member  
Engagement**

**1-800-782-8663**  
(TTY/TDD: 711)

**HOURS:**  
7 days a week,  
from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

**Nurse on call**

**1-888-866-5432**

Speak to a registered nurse at any time of day or night about a non-life-threatening illness or injury.

**MDLive virtual visits**

**1-800-400-MDLIVE**  
or **MDLive.com/AvMed**

Speak with a licensed doctor virtually or by phone from the comfort of home 24/7/365 for non-emergency symptoms. Prescriptions will be sent to your local pharmacy.

**DispatchHealth**

**1-888-489-0212**

Licensed medical professionals come to you ready to treat urgent issues such as cuts and infections. Call 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily to determine if they are available in your area.

**Urgent care center**

**AvMed.org**

If you think you have bronchitis, an infection, an allergic reaction or need wound care, visit an urgent care center if your physician is unavailable. To find an in-network center, go to AvMed.org.

**Emergency department**

If you suspect a heart attack or stroke, or have uncontrollable bleeding or trouble breathing, don't wait: Call 911 or go to the ER.