Use of blue/grey reliever medication to provide asthma first aid at schools, workplaces and community events

Issue 25, January 2015

Target audience: Schools; workplaces; emergency services.

Purpose

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information about the regulations for use of Schedule 3 (S3) salbutamol or S3 terbutaline (blue/grey reliever medication) to provide asthma first aid in Queensland schools, workplaces and at community events.

Background

Asthma is a long-term condition which affects the airways in the lungs. People with asthma have sensitive airways that narrow in response to a trigger.

A sudden or severe asthma flare-up can happen to anyone with asthma, at any time (even those without a formal diagnosis) and requires emergency treatment with blue/grey reliever medication. In a school, workplace or community setting, blue/grey reliever medication should be readily available and easy to access in the event of an asthma emergency as individuals may not have their own medication with them or they may experience their first asthma symptoms in that setting.

The administration of blue/grey reliever medication in the provision of asthma first aid at a school, workplace or community event is governed by the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996 (HDPR). The HDPR has provisions to ensure that medicines are used safely and effectively, by people with appropriate endorsements and adequate training.

What the HDPR says:

First aid management of suspected asthma

A person who has completed an asthma management course approved by the Department of Health is authorised to administer S3 salbutamol or S3 terbutaline (blue/grey reliever medication) in accordance with the national asthma first aid procedure (see attachment) in the event of a suspected asthma emergency at a school, workplace or community event. (see Section 256B HDPR)

It is safe for trained personnel at a school, workplace or community event to administer blue/grey reliever medication to a person:

- without a formal diagnosis of asthma
- when it has not been prescribed.
Purchase of medication for use in asthma first aid

A person who has completed an asthma management course approved by the Department of Health is authorised to purchase S3 salbutamol or S3 terbutaline (blue/grey reliever medication) for use in asthma first aid. This medication does not need to be purchased for a specific individual, does not require labelling or counselling and can therefore be used as an emergency blue/grey reliever medication at a school, workplace or community event. (see section 277 HDPR)

Recommendations

- Disseminate this fact sheet to all relevant services and employees.
- Ensure employees are aware of the relevant sections of the HDPR (s256A, s256B, s277) and how they apply to them.
- Ensure the national asthma first aid procedure is available (see attached).
- Ensure individual asthma management plans are in place where appropriate (e.g. schools).
- It is recommended that organisations conduct a risk assessment to determine the quantity and location of blue/grey reliever medication and spacers required. Medication expiry dates should be checked regularly.
- Spacers should be used when administering blue/grey reliever medication. Spacers are a single person use device in schools, workplaces and at community events.

For more information please contact:

Medicines Regulation and Quality
(for enquiries related to the HDPR)

Phone: 07 3328 9808
Fax: 07 3328 9821
Email: MRQ@health.qld.gov.au

or

Asthma Foundation Queensland
(for enquiries related to asthma first aid and/or asthma management)

Phone: 07 3252 7677
Fax: 07 3257 1080
Email: info@asthmaqld.org.au
1. Sit the person upright
   — Be calm and reassuring
   — Do not leave them alone

2. Give 4 separate puffs of blue/grey reliever puffer
   — Shake puffer
   — Put 1 puff into spacer
   — Take 4 breaths from spacer
   Repeat until 4 puffs have been taken
   Remember: Shake, 1 puff, 4 breaths
   OR Give 2 separate doses of a Bricanyl inhaler (age 6 & over) or a Symbicort inhaler (over 12).

3. Wait 4 minutes
   — If there is no improvement, give 4 more separate puffs of blue/grey reliever as above
     (OR give 1 more dose of Bricanyl or Symbicort inhaler.)

4. If there is still no improvement call emergency assistance (DIAL 000)
   — Say ‘ambulance’ and that someone is having an asthma attack
   — Keep giving 4 separate puffs every 4 minutes until emergency assistance arrives
     (OR 1 dose of Bricanyl or Symbicort every 4 minutes — up to 3 more doses of Symbicort).

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Call emergency assistance immediately (DIAL 000)
— If the person is not breathing
— If the person’s asthma suddenly becomes worse, or is not improving
— If the person is having an asthma attack and a reliever is not available
— If you are not sure if it’s asthma
— If the person is known to have Anaphylaxis - follow their Anaphylaxis Action Plan, then give Asthma First Aid.

Blue/grey reliever medication is unlikely to harm, even if the person does not have asthma

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Asthma Australia
Contact your local Asthma Foundation
1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462) asthmaaustralia.org.au

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