

**Asthma Awareness and Education Program  
and  
Office on Women's Health**



**Health Fact Sheet: Asthma and Women**

**What is asthma?**

- Asthma is a serious and chronic disease that is marked by swelling in the airways.
- Symptoms of asthma include shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing and chest tightness.
- Uncontrolled asthma can lead to emergency department visits, hospitalization and even death.
- Symptoms can be triggered by dust mites, smoke, roaches, rodents, pets, mold, mildew, and strong odors.

**Why is asthma an important health issue for women?**<sup>1</sup>

- In New Jersey, the number of women with asthma is almost double the number of men.
- Almost 10% of women in New Jersey currently have asthma.
- Women are more likely to visit the emergency department for asthma.
- Women are more likely to be hospitalized for asthma.
- Women have longer hospital stays for asthma.
- Death rates for asthma are higher among women.
- Symptoms worsen during pregnancy for about 30% of women with mild asthma.<sup>2</sup>
- Uncontrolled asthma can cause serious health problems for pregnant women and their unborn children.<sup>2</sup>

**What can women do to control their asthma?**

- To help you control your asthma, ask your doctor to complete an Asthma Action Plan. For more information, contact the Pediatric Adult Asthma Coalition of New Jersey (PACNJ) at 866-PACNJ-88 or visit <http://www.pacnj.org/> to download the form in English or Spanish.
- Learn how to avoid asthma triggers, recognize early symptoms, and take action when symptoms start. For more information, contact PACNJ at 866-PACNJ-88 or visit <http://www.pacnj.org/>.
- See your doctor as instructed even if you are feeling well.
- Smoking can make your asthma worse. Contact New Jersey Quitnet at 1-866-NJSTOPS or <http://www.nj.quitnet.com/> for information about how to quit.
- People with asthma are more likely to have complications from the flu. Talk with your doctor about getting a flu shot every year.

## **What can women do if they are pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant?**

- Talk with your doctor early on about how to manage your asthma during pregnancy.
- Talk with your doctor about any changes in your asthma symptoms during pregnancy.
- Avoid triggers that make your asthma worse.
- Health conditions like allergies and reflux can affect your symptoms. Talk with your doctor early on about how to manage other conditions that might change your asthma.

## **Where can I find more information about asthma?**

- **New Jersey Asthma Awareness and Education Program**  
[www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/asthma/index.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/asthma/index.shtml)
- **New Jersey Office on Women's Health**  
[www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/owh/index.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/owh/index.shtml)
- **Pediatric/Adult Asthma Coalition of New Jersey**  
[www.pacnj.org/](http://www.pacnj.org/)
- **National Heart Lung and Blood Institute**  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Asthma/Asthma\\_WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Asthma/Asthma_WhatIs.html)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[www.cdc.gov/asthma](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma)

### **Sources:**

1. New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Asthma in New Jersey Update 2006, [http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/asthma/documents/asthma\\_update2006.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/asthma/documents/asthma_update2006.pdf).
2. National Institutes of Health, New Treatment Guidelines for Pregnant Women with Asthma – *Monitoring and Managing Asthma Important for Healthy Mother and Baby*, January 11, 2005 <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/new/press/05-01-11.htm>.

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