



# Caring for a child with asthma

## Q&A with University of Chicago Medicine Comer Children's Hospital Specialists



**B. Louise Giles, MD**  
Assistant Professor  
of Pediatrics

Medical Director, Pediatric  
Respiratory Therapy  
Program Director, Pediatric  
Pulmonology Fellowship

**Q:** *Is my child at risk for developing asthma?*

**Dr. Giles:** Your child is at greater risk if your family has a history of asthma and/or allergies, and if he or she was exposed to tobacco smoke before or after birth. Asthma is also overrepresented in black and Hispanic populations.

**Q:** *What are the symptoms of childhood asthma?*

**Dr. Giles:** Symptoms include wheezing sounds while breathing, difficulty catching a breath, and a cough that's unusual or comes at specific times such as nighttime or during exercise.

**Q:** *What can trigger an asthma attack?*

**Dr. Giles:** Triggers include viral infections such as the

flu, exposure to allergens such as pets, cold weather and bad air quality. For children suffering from an acute asthma attack, Comer Children's Hospital offers state-of-the-art emergency and inpatient care.

**Q:** *When should we go to the emergency room?*

**Dr. Giles:** Go to the emergency room if you're worried about your child's breathing. Warning signs may include off-color skin tone, a cough that prevents eating or drinking, and the need to take medications more often than prescribed.

**Q:** *What challenges do children with asthma face?*

**Dr. Giles:** Children with asthma may lose sleep, be overly tired during the day and have difficulty concentrating. Some overeat, resulting in a weight

issue. They may have to miss school and take part in fewer activities. Children may hide their asthma from their peers and teachers to avoid feeling like a social outcast.

**Q:** *If I suspect my child suffers from asthma, what can I do?*

**Dr. Giles:** You can make an appointment at Comer Children's Hospital where we will conduct a thorough physical exam, take your child's medical history and do age-appropriate testing such as a lung x-ray and breathing and allergy tests.

**Q:** *What happens next?*

**Dr. Giles:** We will create an asthma plan which may include medicines and devices to help reduce inflammation and relax muscle cells in the airway. It is important to give controller

medication even when your child is well.

**Q:** *Are there lifestyle changes we should make if our child is diagnosed with asthma?*

**Dr. Giles:** Remove carpets, stuffed animals or anything that harbors allergens, and vacuum floors frequently. If your child is allergic to the family dog or cat, find another home for the pet or bathe it more often. If anyone smokes, quit.

**Q:** *What research is underway at Comer Children's Hospital that might help my child?*

**Dr. Giles:** Our studies are aimed at uncovering the genetic basis and underlying processes in the airways that cause asthma. We hope to provide solutions to this growing problem, especially in urban neighborhoods.



*Asthma patient Tanzel Munroe with B. Louise Giles, MD*

**Asthma care** at the University of Chicago Medicine Comer Children's Hospital

Our Asthma Center works with patients and families to bring a child's asthma under the best control possible and to help him or her stay active. Your child's care team includes:

- » Physicians and nurses specializing in asthma care
- » Social workers
- » Respiratory care therapists
- » Asthma educators