

Thunderstorm Asthma

Media Kit

Help us create awareness of epidemic thunderstorm asthma this grass pollen season

1 October to 31 December 2018

betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstormasthma



Help us spread awareness about epidemic thunderstorm asthma

About this kit

This kit has been created to assist media to share information with the public about epidemic thunderstorm asthma.

The grass pollen season in Victoria runs from 1 October to 31 December.

It is important that the community understands what epidemic thunderstorm asthma is, when it can occur throughout the grass pollen season and who is most at risk of being affected.

Epidemic thunderstorm asthma can be extremely serious and life threatening for some Victorians - particularly for those who have or have had asthma or hay fever, and for those with undiagnosed asthma.

But if Victorians are more aware of the chance of epidemic thunderstorm asthma this grass pollen season, they can be prepared and manage any asthma or allergies.

The Department of Health and Human Services thanks you for helping us raise awareness of epidemic thunderstorm asthma this grass pollen season.

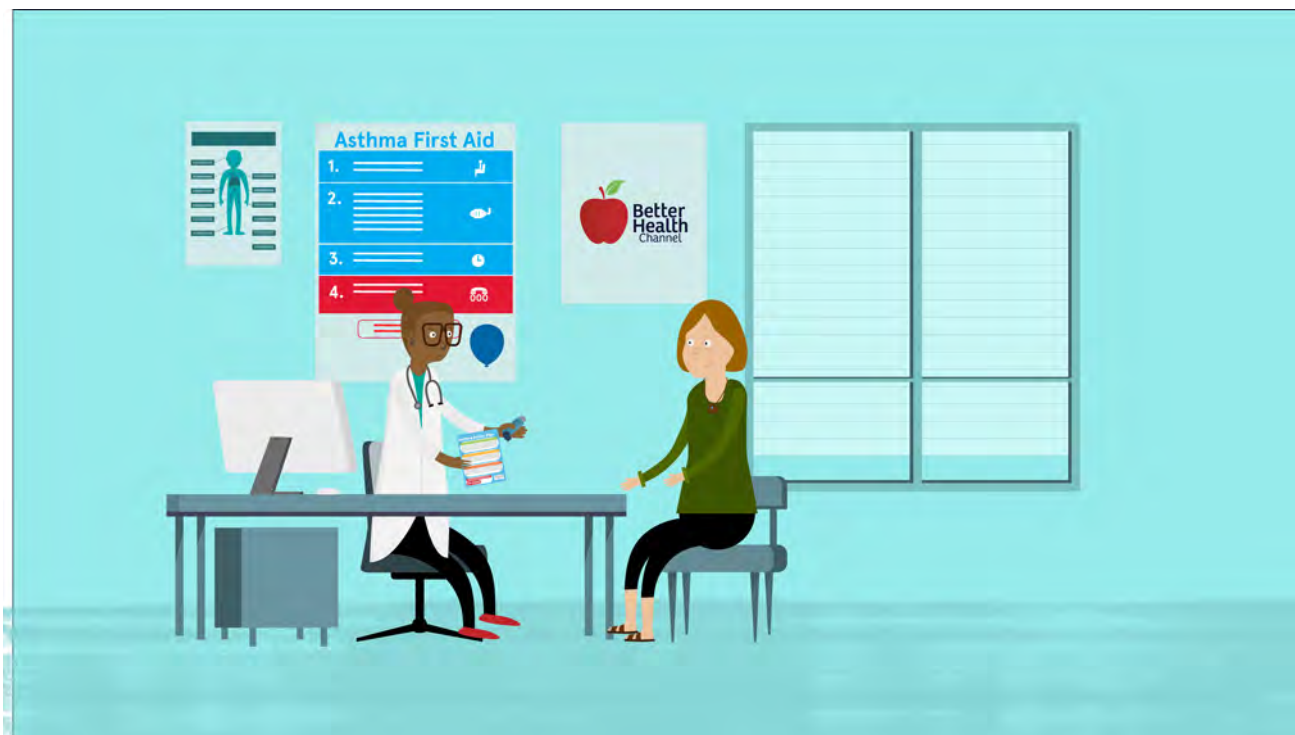
For more information:

betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstormasthma

To use videos, images and infographics from this document

High resolution and web-ready files can be downloaded via the following URL:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstorm-asthma-media



Facts about epidemic thunderstorm asthma



What is epidemic thunderstorm asthma?

Epidemic thunderstorm asthma is thought to be triggered by a unique combination of high grass pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm, causing a large number of people to develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time.

When can it occur?

These events are uncommon and don't occur every year, but when they do, they can happen during grass pollen season from 1 October through to 31 December in Victoria. On 21 November 2016, Melbourne experienced the largest epidemic thunderstorm asthma event in the world.

Who is at most risk of being affected?

People with a history of asthma or hay fever. For them, thunderstorm asthma can be sudden, serious and even life threatening. People with undiagnosed asthma or hay fever are also at risk.

How do you know if you could have undiagnosed asthma?

If you experience wheezing, shortness of breath, a tight feeling in the chest or persistent coughing, then you may have asthma. These symptoms may come and go, or you might not have all of them, but it's important to talk to your doctor and get checked before grass pollen season starts on 1 October.

How can you protect yourself from epidemic thunderstorm asthma?

Victoria has an epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system that provides daily forecasts from 1 October to 31 December. Be aware of epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasts. If you have a history of asthma or hay fever:

- Always follow your asthma action plan or hay fever treatment plan. Know how and when to take your medications properly. Carry your blue or grey reliever puffer and spacer.
- Learn the four steps of asthma first aid.
- Where possible, avoid being outside during thunderstorms from October through December – especially in the wind gusts that come before the storm.

How can you tell if you may be experiencing epidemic thunderstorm asthma?

You have been exposed to a thunderstorm on a high pollen day between October and end December and you are experiencing the most common symptoms of asthma: Wheezing, shortness of breath, a tight feeling in the chest and persistent coughing.

What should you do if someone you're with is experiencing epidemic thunderstorm asthma?

If you think someone is having an asthma attack:

- Step 1: Sit the person upright.
- Step 2: Give 4 separate puffs of their blue or grey reliever puffer – make sure you shake the puffer, put 1 puff into the spacer and get the person to take 4 breaths from the spacer. Repeat this until the person has taken 4 puffs. Remember: shake, 1 puff, 4 breaths.
- Step 3: Wait 4 minutes. If there is no improvement, give the person 4 more separate puffs as in step 2. Remember: shake, 1 puff, 4 breaths.
- Step 4: If there is still no improvement dial triple zero (000) for an ambulance. Keep giving the person 4 separate puffs every 4 minutes until emergency assistance arrives.

If you don't have a spacer, simply inhale 4 puffs directly by mouth.

Call triple zero (000) immediately if the person is not breathing, if their asthma suddenly becomes worse, or if the person is having an asthma attack and there's no blue or grey reliever available.

If you're not sure that it's asthma, call triple zero (000) immediately.

Remember, asthma reliever medication is unlikely to cause harm, even if the person doesn't have asthma.

How is the Victorian Government helping to protect people from epidemic thunderstorm asthma?

Since the 2016 epidemic thunderstorm asthma event, the Victorian Government has undertaken a range of activities, including:

- Creating and turning on Victoria's first epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system in 2017.
- Improving how warnings are issued on VicEmergency.
- Developing expert clinical guidelines to identify and manage those at increased risk.
- Implementing a public health campaign and education programs for the Victorian community and health professionals.
- Updating the revised State Health Emergency Response Plan and improving how the Department of Health and Human Services plans, communicates and works with health services during emergencies.

For more information about thunderstorm asthma and how you can be prepared, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstormasthma

Infographics

Please consider sharing our infographics across your websites, apps, programs, publications and social media.

Download our infographics here: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstorm-asthma-media

SIGNS OF THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA

You could experience Thunderstorm Asthma if:

- 1 You have asthma, hay fever or have had one of these before
- 2 You wheeze and sneeze during pollen season
- 3 It's grass pollen season (October - December)
- 4 You're outside during the wind before a thunderstorm and there's lots of pollen in the air.

If you're experiencing Thunderstorm Asthma, you could be:

- 1 Wheezing (there's a whistling sound when you breathe out)
- 2 Feeling like you can't breathe
- 3 Feeling like your chest is tight
- 4 Coughing a lot.

Check the Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma forecast at: <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare/#thunderstorm-asthma-forecast>

For more information: betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstormasthma

VICTORIA
State Government

The infographic features a dark blue background with a red header. It includes illustrations of a storm cloud with a lightning bolt, a pharmacy sign, and a man in a suit. The text is organized into two columns with numbered lists.

Infographic for download:
Signs of Thunderstorm
Asthma

STAYING SAFE FROM THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA

Things you can do to prevent Thunderstorm Asthma during the grass pollen season (October-December)

- 1 Check the Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma forecast between 1 October and 31 December <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare/#thunderstorm-asthma-forecast>
- 2 If you have asthma or hay fever – follow your asthma action plan or hay fever treatment plan. Know how and when to take your medications properly.
- 3 If you think you may have asthma or hay fever – talk to your doctor before grass pollen season starts in October.
- 4 Avoid thunderstorms – especially the wind gusts before the storm. Stay inside and close doors and windows. Turn air conditioning onto recirculate.

For more information: betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstormasthma

VICTORIA
State Government

The infographic features a dark blue background with a red header. It includes illustrations of a calendar for October and a hand holding an Asthma Action Plan document. The text is organized into a single column with numbered lists.

Infographic for download:
Staying safe from
Thunderstorm Asthma

Videos

Help us raise awareness of Thunderstorm Asthma by sharing our videos via your digital channels.

See all videos via our YouTube playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLplfF3Uu2rPe3Qym7TUMxfkmVoKKoecSk>

If you need mp4 high resolution downloads: please contact us.



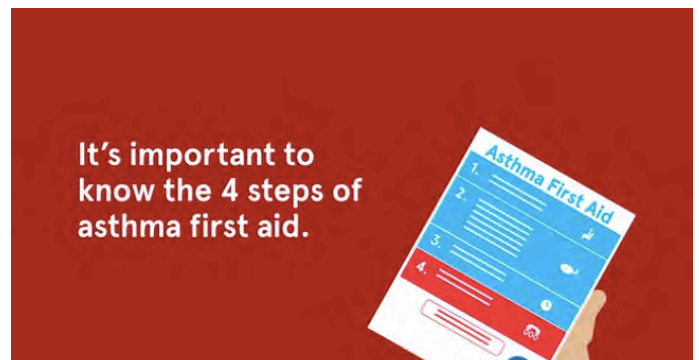
Video #1: Thunderstorm Asthma Overview



Video #2: Asthma and Thunderstorm Asthma



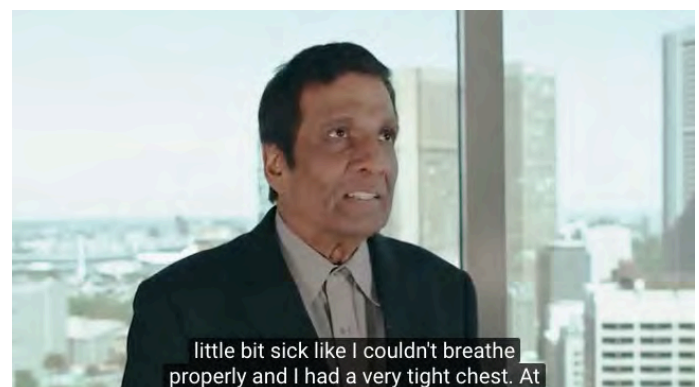
Video #3: Hay fever and Thunderstorm Asthma



Video #4: Asthma First Aid



Video #5: Thunderstorm asthma - who is at risk?



Video #6: Uday's story

Social media graphics

Please consider using any of these graphics for social media posts about your news story.

Download social-ready graphics here: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/thunderstorm-asthma-media



Social media tile #1



Social media tile #2



Social media tile #3



Social media tile #4

Case studies

Contact us to help find talent for your stories. You can also consider using Uday's story below.

[From coma to successful asthma management: Uday Dhumatkar's story](#)

On an afternoon in November 2010, Melbourne grandfather Uday Dhumatkar mowed the lawn at his suburban home.

As evening came, he began to feel tight in the chest and dizzy. His condition worsened as the night went on. Around midnight he woke feeling quite unwell.

Uday had migrated to Australia from India in the 1980s. He had asthma for a long time, but his condition worsened when he moved to Melbourne.

On that midnight in November 2010, Uday tried taking his asthma reliever medication – using his puffer and spacer and going through the four steps of asthma first aid. When he didn't improve, his wife called an ambulance. He was treated and taken to hospital, and returned home after an hour or so.

Unfortunately, Uday's condition again worsened. At around 5am, Uday's wife called an ambulance and he was rushed to hospital – something Uday himself does not remember.

"I had a very bad breathing difficulty – my chest was like a stone. I couldn't breathe," Uday said.

"As my wife explained to me, I was black and blue. I woke up after 36 hours. They had put me into an induced coma."

Uday was in the Intensive Care Unit at the Epworth Freemasons in East Melbourne for 12 days. He recovered slowly, and began taking new steps towards successful asthma management.

After his coma, Uday's doctor told him he was allergic to grass - something he never knew. He now checks the pollen count every day. He has an asthma action plan and keeps his asthma preventer medication by his toothbrush, so he remembers to take it twice a day.

"I always keep myself ready, and always carry [reliever medication] in my pocket, so if I go out – if there is an emergency, or I don't feel well – I use the [reliever] and then come back home."

On 21 November 2016 - the day of Victoria's worst ever epidemic thunderstorm asthma event - Uday was unaffected. He was ready and alert to the high pollen count.

With his asthma under control, Uday says he can do anything he wants: "I travel, I go to various places, and of course I have four grandkids – I play with them, I take them away. So asthma is no hindrance to my enjoyment and fulfilment of my life."

[Contact us to speak with Uday and his family.](#)



Contact us

Media contacts

For case studies and local media:

Jane Metlikovec

Welcomm

0409 539 880 | jane@welcomm.com.au

For all health enquiries, contact the Department of Health and Human Services' 24-hour media line:

9096 8860 | media@dhhs.vic.gov.au