

Asthma is a serious disorder affecting millions of Americans each year. As the summer heats up, the nation's emergency physicians want those affected by it to know how to prevent a visit to the emergency department.

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways in the lungs. There are an estimated 25.7 million people with asthma, seven million of whom are children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, asthma prevalence has increased from 7.3 percent in 2001 to 8.4 percent in 2010.

In many cases, asthma symptoms can be brought on by allergy-causing substances, including: animals, mold, pollen, dust, smoke (especially tobacco smoke), chemicals in the air or in food, stress, respiratory infections (examples: common cold, flu, bronchitis), changes in air, and exercise.

Symptoms include shortness of breath that get worse with exercise or activity, coughing or wheezing without producing phlegm. Go to the nearest emergency department if experiencing:

- Abnormal breathing pattern (example, breathing out takes more than twice as long as breathing in)
- Rapid pulse
- Extreme difficulty breathing
- Bluish lips and face
- Extreme sweating
- Severe anxiety due to shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Tightness in the chest

For more information on this or other health-related topics, go to www.EmergencyCareForYou.org.