

# Helping your child manage reactive airways

---

## What are reactive airways?

Reactive airways is a medical term for breathing problems that occur when something triggers a reaction in the airways (breathing passages).

In the reaction, airways become narrow due to:

- a build-up of mucus
- inflammation and swelling
- tightened muscles around the airways

**When airways get narrow the opening for air gets smaller. This makes it hard to breathe.**

Common symptoms	Other symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wheezing (the sound of air passing through narrowed airways)</li> <li>• shortness of breath</li> <li>• coughing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taking small, faster breaths</li> <li>• nostrils flare with each breath</li> <li>• skin pulling in between and under ribs because breathing in takes so much effort</li> </ul>

## What causes airways to react?

The cause or “trigger” for the reaction varies. Children’s airways may react to infections, viruses, allergens or something in the environment. It is helpful to learn what starts your child’s symptoms or makes them worse. Knowing your child’s triggers will help you control his or her symptoms.

Triggers that cause the lungs to swell and fill with mucus	Triggers that cause airway muscles to tighten
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allergens</li> <li>• smoke</li> <li>• infections such as a cold or the flu</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exercise</li> <li>• cold air or a change in temperature</li> <li>• pollution</li> <li>• humidity</li> <li>• emotion and stress</li> </ul>

## How do medications help?

There are two kinds of medication for treating reactive airways.

### 1. Rescue or reliever medication

- Rescue medication relaxes the tightened muscles around the airway. This "opens" the airway and makes breathing easier.
- This medication is used "as needed" to quickly relieve your child's wheeze or cough and rescues his/her breathing. It starts to work right away.
- This medication is called Salbutamol (Ventolin®). It is a blue puffer and should always be given using an aerochamber.

### 2. Preventer or controller medication

- Preventer medications work over a long period of time to help control reactive airway symptoms and prevent them from coming back.
- These medications help reduce inflammation around the airways and reduce mucous build-up in the airways.
- Your child may need to start taking more of a preventer medication during a flare-up, but it does not work to rescue breathing. Your child will still need to take rescue medication.
- Preventer medications can be either puffers or medications taken by mouth.

## What is the best way to control or treat my child's reactive airways?

The nurse, doctor and/or pharmacist will help you learn how to control your child's reactive airways, how to avoid triggers, and what medications will help to relieve symptoms.

Use the chart on the next page to manage your child's reactive airways. The severity of your child's symptoms determine the zone (green, yellow and red like a traffic light) and the best treatment.

## Managing your child's reactive airways

**Rescue medication:** Salbutamol (Ventolin) in blue puffer. Give with aerochamber.

How your child looks or feels	Treatment
<b>Green Zone</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breathing is easy.</li> <li>• Your child has no symptoms.</li> <li>• Airways are under control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No coughing or wheezing during the day or night.</li> <li>• Seldom uses rescue medication.</li> <li>• Can do normal activities (such as playing, gym class or sports) without coughing, wheezing or feeling short of breath.</li> </ul>
<b>Yellow Zone</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting to show symptoms such as coughing and wheezing.</li> <li>• Your child needs more rescue medication to get relief.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coughing and/or wheezing during daily activities.</li> <li>• Coughing and/or wheezing during the night or awakes even 1 night a week with cough or wheeze.</li> <li>• Needs rescue medication more than 3 times a week.</li> <li>• Unable to play or exercise without cough or wheeze.</li> <li>• A cold or flu may cause airways to get worse within 1 to 2 days.</li> </ul>
<b>Red Zone</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your child needs medical help to control the reactive airways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath all day.</li> <li>• Difficulty sleeping or symptoms lasting all night.</li> <li>• Rescue medication relieves symptoms for less than 2 hours.</li> <li>• Difficulty talking or catching a breath.</li> <li>• Breathing is fast, difficult or chest feels heavy.</li> <li>• Fear symptoms are getting worse.</li> </ul>

## When you go home from the Emergency Department

**1**

Give \_\_\_\_ puffs of Salbutamol (Ventolin/blue puffer) with the aerochamber every 4 hours for \_\_\_\_ day(s).



**2**

If you see improvement in your child's symptoms (ie; your child is no longer wheezing or having difficulty breathing) you can reduce the Salbutamol (Ventolin/blue puffer) to the usual "as needed" dose ( \_\_\_\_ puffs every 4 hours as needed).



**3**

Your child needs a follow-up visit with:

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Medication	Name of Medication	How much?	How often?	Specific Instructions
<b>Rescue/Reliever Medication</b>				
<b>Controller/Preventer Medication</b>				
<b>Other medications (such as antibiotics or steroids)</b>				