

Worldwide Asthma Societies' Recommendations During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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There have been many pandemics in the world which were worse than the current COVID-19 pandemic. But due to the emergence of widespread digital technology through mobile phones, this pandemic seems to have caused more panic, especially in people who have co morbid chronic conditions like cardiac, respiratory illnesses and immune compromised individuals. In children the stress could be compounded by added stress of parents and grandparents. Even though WHO has plenty of information on COVID -19, there is no specific guidelines on treating children with asthma during this pandemic. Children who become acutely ill and need hospital intervention will be taken care of in our acute hospital setting. However, children at home will need more guidance on how to prevent and how to be prepared with this pandemic. In this letter, we explore some of the guidelines laid by important asthma societies around the world with regards to the proper management of Asthma in the paediatric population within the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the important messages they send to healthcare professionals and the general public.

After reviewing recommendation from various important Asthma societies worldwide like American Academy of Allergy Asthma Immunology, National Asthma Council Australia, Asthma Society of Ireland, NICE guidelines and Asthma UK guidelines, we observed the following advice. We found that all these societies shared common pathways regarding management of asthma during the COVID 19 pandemic, these recommendations included : following hand hygiene measures, maintaining social distancing, making sure the patient has an updated asthma action plan, continuing asthma medications as normal including inhaled corticosteroids and bronchodilators, to ensure patients have at least a month's supply of medication, to avoid stockpiling medications and to be prepared for the flu season. Most of the societies suggest avoiding aerosol generating procedures as much as possible (including nebulisers). While some of these societies like NICE guidelines and Asthma UK advised patients and carers to continue using nebulisers at home because the aerosol comes from the fluid in the nebuliser chamber and does not transmit the virus particle among patients. The Irish Asthma Society and NICE guidelines also advised the patients to continue their biological therapy as there is no evidence that it suppresses immunity. NICE guidelines were also unique in advising physicians to start biologic therapies on appropriate patients even during the COVID-19 restricted service.

In conclusion, most of the asthma societies recommended focusing on prevention of the spread of the virus. Importance was given to minimise exposure among vulnerable groups through promoting hygienic practices, social distancing. They also emphasised the need for good communication with patients and their carers to support mental wellbeing and mitigate their anxiety. They also advised to provide management options at home to minimise hospital admission and thus prevent virus exposure.

We hope this information will be very useful to decrease stress among many families in Ireland and reassure them that by following simple routine advices, they can maintain good health during this restricted health service.

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