



THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA

October 2023

Thunderstorm asthma can be life threatening. It is thought to be triggered by an uncommon combination of high pollen levels and certain type of thunderstorm, causing many people to develop asthma symptoms over a short period of time. In regions with seasonal high concentrations of airborne grass pollen, thunderstorms in spring and early summer can trigger asthma in people with grass pollen allergy, even if they have not had asthma before. These events are likely to occur in the months of early October through to late December and move in a west to east direction across Victoria.

Possible impacts on the health system	During a thunderstorm asthma alert day, primary care providers, specifically general practice and pharmacies, are likely to experience a high number of patients presenting with anxiety, allergy symptoms and respiratory conditions such as asthma attacks. Other emergency services: ambulance, hospital emergency departments, Priority Primary Care Centres (PPCCs) and Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (UCCs) may also experience increased presentations.
Consider the role of your practice in an emergency	See RACGP's emergency planning and response in general practice Thunderstorm asthma fact sheet
Consider an asthma action plan with at risk patients	If asthma is triggered by pollens and is worse in spring and summer, it is important for patients to have a current Asthma Action Plan
Know the pollen rating and risk of thunderstorm asthma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AirRater Air Quality Monitor & Allergy Symptom Tracker• Bureau of Meteorology• PollenForecast• VicEmergency for high-risk thunderstorm asthma/allergy day alerts
Keep up-to-date with alerts and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subscribe to heat health and thunderstorm asthma alerts• Learn more about Thunderstorm Asthma HealthPathway• Preparing patients for a disaster HealthPathway• Post-natural disaster health HealthPathway
Management of people at-risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage people with asthma and allergic rhinitis to stay indoors and reduce exposure to outside air (turn off air conditioners and close windows).• Ensure a current Asthma Action Plan.• Asthma preventer medication is commenced prior to high-risk season.• People experiencing severe symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, shortness of breath or cough should seek urgent medical assistance.• Train staff in emergency asthma management, including non-clinical staff• Increased bronchodilators (Ventolin) and resuscitation medication on site – appropriate equipment (spacers) available.• Vulnerable population list of patients ready and handy

Update your emergency response documents	Preferably use the Emergency Response Planning Tool (ERPT) (available to general practices until December 2024) and ensure staff are familiar with it. If using a paper system, store a copy off site. This will help you stay focused, be able to respond under pressure and get your business running more quickly.
Ensure emergency contact details are up-to-date	So that Murray PHN can assist in coordinating support with government agencies during an emergency ensure to let us know who your emergency contacts are via your Quality Improvement Consultant or primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au
Communicate service closures or impacts	Use social media and other platforms. Prepare a message or email to patients using appointment confirmation system or Pen CS if needed. Use Pen CS and CAT Plus recipes to identify relevant patient groups and send an SMS message to those patients who have not opted out. You will need to set up your account and ensure you have enough credits in the system to send the messages. Inform Murray PHN of service closures or impacts: primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au
Plan staffing	In the event of no or reduced access to your site or staff absences, consider alternate models of work, alternate sites and equipment needs (ERPT can guide you through these considerations): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the practitioners set up with ePrescribing so patients can obtain scripts immediately and remotely? Ensure paper scripts/prescribing pads are also available in the event that no internet is available. • Does the practice have an alternate contact number, or can you temporarily divert your practice number, so patients can call if the building is closed, and the phone system is inaccessible? • Can admin and clinical staff access your practice management and clinical software systems off site to facilitate remote models of care? • Ensure clinicians are able to create pathology and imaging requests if working remotely. <p>Have information available for VVED to share with patients.</p>
Protect your data	Ensure that your practice software is backed up, ideally to the cloud, to reduce the risk of data loss. Upload patient information to My Health Record
Join the emergency volunteer list	If you have capacity to support in an emergency event, register your interest using the online form .
Do emergency exercise training	Undertake mock training incidents to ensure staff are competent and aware of their roles in the event of an emergency.

Other useful links and resources to share with patients

- [Thunderstorm asthma | healthdirect](#)
- [Thunderstorm asthma - National Asthma Council Australia](#)
- [Thunderstorm asthma - Better Health Channel](#)
- [PollenForecast - PollenForecast](#)
- [My Health Record](#)
- [Alternative after hours and emergency care options](#)

Contact us

For more information or support email primarycareresponse@murrayphn.org.au