

ASTHMA ADVICE AT THE OTHER END OF THE LINE

With 470,000 people living with asthma in Ireland and research showing that 60% of Irish asthmatics do not have their condition under control, the Asthma Society is calling on more asthmatics to use its free adviceline to help them to better manage their condition.

The Asthma Society's new adviceline service has helped 70% of those under 50 to avoid missing school or work as a result of their asthma. And on foot of a recent partnership review of the service, 70% of service users aged 50 years and under found the adviceline helped them to avoid missing work or school because of their asthma. The research also highlighted that 56% of callers did not have a self-management plan for their asthma but subsequently drew one up and used it after their call.

Commenting on the successful HSE partnership with the Adviceline service, Shirley Keane from the HSE said: "For many people, asthma is a challenging condition to manage. Children miss an average of 10 days at school each year due to asthma.

"Our research shows that the service helps 70% of callers aged 50 years and under to avoid missing school or work due to their asthma. I would encourage all asthmatics or their carers to use the free adviceline on **1800 44 54 64**."

Sarah O'Connor, CEO of the Asthma Society, said they want to encourage more people to avail of the free service so that people with asthma feel well, keep their asthma under control, and lead the fullest life, symptom-free.

"In 2016, the Asthma Adviceline was awarded an independent quality mark by the Helplines Partnership, one of only three helplines in Ireland to have achieved this standard. This is only one of the brilliant supports the Asthma Society provides and, with such positive impacts on people's



Sarah O'Connor, CEO of the Asthma Society.

health and lifestyle, we would like it to be a standard, repeat, free support used by every person with asthma in Ireland."

MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE

Asthma Society's Chairman Oliver Carroll said their new CEO's background in communications campaigns and public affairs will be invaluable to their work advocating for the care and services available to the 470,000 people with asthma in Ireland.

"Sarah's personal experience of having asthma means that she really understands the challenges that people face in managing their asthma. I look forward to working with her on the excellent work we do year-round to support people with asthma."

Sarah O'Connor added: "Fighting to breathe is a terrifying experience and I would not wish it on anyone. As a young child, I was diagnosed with asthma at an early age and I have lived with it as part of my life ever since.

"That's why I am so proud to take on this role – the Asthma Society provides information, practical and informed advice, training, news, and smart health promotion programmes. The Society's work makes a real difference to the lives of people with asthma."

ANNUAL ASTHMA GP REVIEW

The Asthma Society's Pre-Budget Submission (Let Me Breathe) contains two key initiatives:

1. The delivery of the long-promised free annual GP asthma review for people with asthma.
2. The change in regulations to make it easier for all schools, clubs, and workplaces to have a reliever inhaler available in the event of someone having an asthma attack – at present, for a member of the public to administer a reliever inhaler requires three days of training.

An annual asthma GP review is an annual appointment with a GP that gives a person with asthma the opportunity to discuss their condition, analyse their medication and assess if it needs to be changed, and find out whether their asthma is properly controlled.

O'Connor, said: "If we want to eradicate preventable asthma deaths and improve asthma control, we must enable people to have their asthma regularly reviewed by their GP. Seven years ago, the HSE National Clinical Programme for Asthma accepted that free annual reviews were essential when they published their plan for asthma care in Ireland.

"Despite this, the only group who can currently avail of such a free annual GP review are children under six. It is imperative that the Government introduce free reviews for everyone with asthma in Budget 2019, starting with everyone under 18 and those diagnosed with severe asthma."

ACCESS TO RELIEVER INHALERS

In October 2015, the Minister for Health signed new regulations allowing trained members of the public to administer lifesaving rescue medicines such as epi pens, glucagon for diabetic hypoglycaemia and reliever asthma inhalers in emergency situations.

The legislation enables bodies to register and obtain the required medication without the need for a prescription and to have it on site for immediate use, but the training for staff is three days long and requires updating every two years. It is generally accepted among the medical community that the side effect of taking a reliever inhaler is slight dizziness.

Reliever asthma inhalers can save a life – it is safe for adults to take 10 puffs in 10 minutes and for children under six to take 6 puffs in 10 minutes when they are having an attack.

"The fact that schools are not registering to keep a reliever inhaler on site is hugely alarming. This means that there may be no inhaler on site to use – which puts all asthma suffering children and adults at risk.

"Minister Harris needs to revisit these regulations as schools have indicated that the accompanying training requirements are overly burdensome. We have to make it workable for schools, workplaces, gyms, and other public spaces to have a reliever inhaler and for someone to be able to administer it. Time is of the essence as it is inevitable that every school will have to deal with a student having an asthma attack at some point," Sarah O'Connor concluded.

For more information visit <https://www.asthma.ie/>

What do people with asthma need?

1. Substantially Reduce Cost of Asthma Medication
2. Free Annual Asthma Review with their GP
3. Specialised Hospital Doctors, Nurses and Diagnostics For Children
4. End the Post-Code Lottery for People with Severe Asthma
5. Re-visit the National Clinical Program for Asthma
6. An Inhaler Can Save a Life
7. Eradicate Outdoor Air Pollution
8. Protect Indoor Air Quality
9. Reduce The Tobacco Threat
10. Fund the Asthma Society's Essential Programmes

Key Stats about Asthma

- 470,000 Irish people have asthma, including one in five children.
- One Irish person dies every week as a result of their asthma – 90% are preventable.
- Every 26 minutes someone in Ireland visits an Emergency Department with asthma – uncontrolled asthma is dangerous.
- Asthma costs the state over €500 million per annum.
- Adults miss 10 work days a year due to their asthma.
- Ireland has the fourth highest prevalence of asthma in the world.
- 3.13 days - the average length of stay with an asthma hospital admission
- Over 5,000 asthma admissions to hospital every year.

