

## **Asthma Can Be Controlled – Expect Nothing Less**

Asthma is a chronic condition. Like high blood pressure or diabetes, asthma usually cannot be cured. But it can be controlled. When you have asthma, your airways are too sensitive to a number of triggers, or substances you may breathe in. Some examples are pollen, pet dander, mold, dust, smoke, and many others. People with asthma can develop symptoms when exposed to these triggers. The airways become inflamed, and the airway muscles tighten. This can cause wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. Some people with asthma have symptoms every day, though most people with asthma have symptoms less often.

The key to controlling asthma is to take your medicine regularly. There are a number of safe and effective medications to treat asthma. Treatment generally starts with inhalers. There are two main types of inhalers. One type is the quick-relief or rescue inhalers. The main one is albuterol, which can be sold under names like Alupent, Proventil, and Ventolin. The other type is the long-term or controller inhalers. Examples include Asmanex, Qvar, and Flovent. Rescue inhalers are used only when there are symptoms and they generally provide relief in 10 to 15 minutes. They relax tight airway muscles, so you can breathe more easily. Controller inhalers can take up to one week to start working. They don't provide immediate relief, but they do help control asthma and can prevent symptoms from developing in the first place. These inhalers need to be taken daily to be effective. They work by reducing airway inflammation, which is one of the causes of cough and wheezing.

To be most effective, both types of inhalers need to be used correctly. If you use an inhaler, make sure your doctor or pharmacist shows you how to use it. There are also pills available for asthma, and your doctor will sometimes prescribe these if the inhalers are not providing enough relief. When a person needs pills for asthma, it is important to keep using your inhalers also.

Sometimes an asthma attack can become so severe an Emergency Room visit is required. If your symptoms become worse even after using a rescue inhaler, or if you are so short of breath that talking is difficult, a visit to the ER is advisable. Fortunately, proper use of rescue inhalers and long-term controller inhalers can usually prevent daily symptoms and reduce the chance of severe asthma attacks.

### **About Partnership HealthPlan of California (PHC)**

PHC is a non-profit community based health care organization that contracts with the State to administer Medi-Cal benefits through local care providers ensuring Medi-Cal recipients have access to comprehensive, cost-effective health care. PHC provides quality health care to over 565,000 Medi-Cal members. Beginning in Solano County in 1994 PHC now provides services to 14 Northern California counties -- Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mendocino, Modoc, Napa, Shasta, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Trinity and Yolo.