Asthma UK issues winter death asthma attack alert

Tuesday 26 January, 2016

Asthma UK is urging people with asthma to be vigilant in winter as data shows the number of people who die because of an asthma attack peaks in January and remains high in February and March.

Data from the Office for National Statistics highlights that asthma is the cause of proportionately more excess winter deaths than other conditions and respiratory diseases were the underlying cause of death in more than a third of all excess winter deaths in 2014/15.

It's thought that cold weather and viruses like cold and flu may be partly to blame; 90% of people with asthma report that cold and flu viruses make their asthma worse and 75% of people find that cold weather triggers an asthma attack. Given the recent bitterly cold weather and an increase in reported cases of flu, Asthma UK wants to ensure that everyone with asthma takes their medicines as prescribed, uses a written asthma action plan and knows what to do if their symptoms start to deteriorate.

Kay Boycott, Chief Executive of Asthma UK, says: “This data shows that as the cold weather hits it is absolutely vital that the 1 in 11 people with asthma in the UK are not complacent about how serious asthma is. The National Review of Asthma Deaths highlighted almost half of those who died from an asthma attack were being treated for mild or moderate asthma, so it's essential that everyone with asthma takes extra care to manage their condition during the winter months. Taking your preventative medicine will help build your resilience and if you use an action plan you are four times less likely to be hospitalised because of your asthma – download one from our website today. ”

The UK has one of the highest asthma death rates in Western Europe three people die because of asthma attacks every day in the UK.

ENDS

For more information please contact the Asthma UK media team on mediaoffice@asthma.org.uk, 020 7786 4949 (during office hours) or 07951 721393 (outside of office hours).

Notes to editors

- More people die in the winter than in the summer, excess winter deaths refers to the number of extra (or excess) deaths that occurred in the winter period. Winter is defined as being between the months of December to March, and is compared to the number of deaths that occurred in the preceding August to November, and the following April to July.

- Respiratory disease accounts for more deaths in those over 75 than circulatory disease and dementia. There were 439,000 excess winter deaths in 2014/15, 13,100 of these were caused by respiratory disease in the over 75s, compared to 8,000 due to circulatory disease and 8,700 due to dementia.
- The UK has some of the highest asthma death rates in Western Europe according to the Death rates (all ages) for OECD nations and the World Health Organisation

About Asthma UK

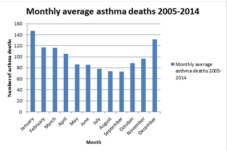
- Asthma UK's mission is to stop asthma attacks and cure asthma. We do this by funding world leading research, campaigning for improved care and supporting people to reduce their risk of a potentially life threatening asthma attack.
- Asthma UK is solely funded by public donations
- The Asthma UK Helpline is open weekdays from 9am to 5pm on 0300 222 5800.
- For more information about asthma please visit www.asthma.org.uk

Background information on asthma

- In the UK, 5.4 million people are currently receiving treatment for asthma: 1.1 million children (1 in 11) and 4.3 million adults (1 in 12).

The UK has one of the highest prevalence rates for asthma in Europe, according to the ERS Whitebook.

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Three people die every day because of asthma; based on mortality data from Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England & Wales, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (Northern Ireland). 1255 people died from asthma in 2013 – divided by 365, this works out as 3.4 people per day.

- Tragically, the National Review of Asthma Deaths found that two thirds of asthma deaths are preventable with good, basic care.
- 7 out of 10 people with asthma do not receive care that meets the most basic clinical standards.

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