Majority are clueless about asthma attacks

Tuesday 3 May, 2016

New data released today by the charity Asthma UK highlights that almost three quarters of people (73%) would not know what to do if someone were to have a potentially life threatening asthma attack.

Someone in the UK has an asthma attack every 10 seconds, yet many people wouldn't know how to help someone if they were struggling to breathe. The charity is particularly concerned that one in every 11 people (9% of respondents) don't think that asthma attacks can kill. Three children in every classroom have asthma, making it the most common long term condition in childhood, so Asthma UK urges parents to understand how serious asthma can be and what to do to help a child having an asthma attack.

Dr Samantha Walker, Director of Research and Policy at Asthma UK, says: "These results demonstrate that asthma as a condition is not being taken seriously enough. The Royal College of Physicians' themselves highlighted that 'complacency in asthma care must end' in the National Review of Asthma Deaths, 2014. What people don't realise is that much like a heart attack, an asthma attack is a medical emergency. Asthma attacks can and do kill. It's essential that people know how to manage their asthma to avoid attacks, we mustn't be complacent. Tragically two thirds of asthma deaths are preventable with good basic care."

Dr Walker adds: "One of saddest things I've heard was from a mother whose son died following an asthma attack who told me *'I never knew that asthma could kill. I just wish someone had told me.*'That's why it is so important that people with asthma manage their condition well and avoid having an asthma attack in the first place. People who use a written asthma action plan are four times less likely to be hospitalised because of an asthma attack and you can download one from our website www.asthma.org.uk. Despite this only 35% of people with asthma have one. Everyone must take asthma seriously."

ENDS

Asthma Attack Advice

The following advice applies to the vast majority of both adults and children who have an asthma attack3:

1) Sit up straight - don't lie down. Try to keep calm.

2) Take one puff of your reliever inhaler (usually blue) every 30-60 seconds, up to a maximum of 10 puffs.

3) If you feel worse at any point while you're using your inhaler or you don't feel better after 10 puffs or you're worried at any time, call 999 for an ambulance.

4) If the ambulance is taking longer than 15 minutes you can repeat step two (above).

Footnotes

1) 3,000 people were surveyed by Gorkana Surveys between Monday 18 and Wednesday 20 April 2016.

2) When asked 'do you know what to do if someone were to have an asthma attack?' 34% answered 'no' and 27% answered 'not sure'. Of the people who said 'yes' just over half (52%) selected the wrong actions when presented with a list of options. Of the people who said 'not sure' 38% selected the correct actions. This works out as 73% of respondents in total.

3) This asthma attack information is not designed for people on a SMART or MART regime. Those on a SMART or MART regime should speak to their GP or asthma nurse to get their personalised set of asthma attack instructions.

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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.

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