Survey reveals hay fever asthma attack danger for millions of people with asthma

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New survey data released today by Asthma UK reveals that half of people with asthma[1] have had a life threatening asthma attack because of their hay fever.

Over 80% of people with asthma in the UK also have hay fever. As this allergy to pollen is a common asthma trigger, the aim of the Asthma UK survey was to find out more about how people cope during pollen season.

The charity polled over 1,340 people with asthma from across the UK and 61% think they are at higher risk of an asthma attack as a result of their hay fever. Worryingly 43% don't know which type of pollen affects them and 52% of respondents don't know when pollen season was, so the chance of treating the pollen allergy at the right time, to cut their risk of a hay fever asthma attack is small. Pollens from trees, grass and weeds can cause symptoms as early as January and as late as September but 52% of respondents didn't know this.

Colette Harris, Head of Health Advice at Asthma UK, said: "Our survey results are concerning as they show people with asthma are aware that hay fever is a common trigger for asthma symptoms and asthma attacks – which kill three people every day in the UK. But they don't realise that some really simple steps taken at the right time of year can cut that risk dramatically.

"It is vital that every adult and child with asthma who also has hay fever takes their asthma medicines and hay fever medicines every day as prescribed to stay safe and well. To find out which kind of pollen affects you and when, keep a diary for your GP or asthma nurse. Then you can use the non-drowsy antihistamines and steroid nasal sprays at the right time, to cut your risk of a hay fever asthma attack.

People with asthma should also check pollen forecasts in their local area, so that on high pollen days they carry their reliever inhaler with them at all times and know what to do if their symptoms get worse.

"Parents should share a copy or picture of their child's written asthma action plan, so anyone looking after them knows what to do if hay fever triggers worsening symptoms or an asthma attack."

The results also showed the huge knock on effect that not managing hay fever at the right time has on people with asthma's well-being and day to day lives. Over 70% of people polled said that they are exhausted, lacking in energy, and unable to enjoy family time at sports days and picnics because miserable hay fever symptoms such as a runny or blocked nose, sneezing and itchy eyes and throat stop them sleeping. Their social lives also suffer as a result, with 57% turning down invitations to events like weddings and parties.

The survey revealed some of the lengths people will go to find relief from hay fever which included going snowboarding, astroturfing their garden to putting tampons up their nose to prevent it from running.

The most common symptoms of hay fever are blocked nose, watery, runny nose, sneezing, itchy nose and watery eyes. Other symptoms can include headaches, reduced sense of smell, itchy eyes, earache, tiredness and disrupted sleep.

The Met Office has reported that unpredictable weather has seen pollen levels remain around the 'very high' status which will continue for the rest of the summer.

For further information on hay fever and asthma visit: www.asthma.org.uk/pollen or call the Asthma UK Helpline on 0300 222 5800 to speak to an expert asthma nurse.

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).

[1] - 1,340 people were surveyed by Asthma UK via Survey Monkey from 14 March – 27 June 2016.

To find out more about asthma actions plans visit: www.asthma.org.uk/advice/manage-your-asthma/action-plan or call the Asthma UK Helpline on 0300 222 5800.

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

You're having an asthma attack if any of the following happens:

Your reliever isn't helping or lasting over four hours

Your symptoms are getting worse (cough, breathlessness, wheeze or tight chest)

You're too breathless or it's difficult to speak, eat or sleep

Your breathing is getting faster and it feels like you can't get your breath in properly

Don't be afraid of causing a fuss, even at night.

What to do in an asthma attack

- Take one to two puffs of your reliever inhaler (usually blue), immediately.
- Sit down and try to take slow, steady breaths.
- If you do not start to feel better, take two puffs of your reliever inhaler (one puff at a time) every two minutes. You can take up to ten puffs.
- If you do not feel better after taking your inhaler as above, or if you are worried at any time, call 999.
- If an ambulance does not arrive within 10 minutes and you are still feeling unwell, repeat step 3.

If your symptoms improve and you do not need to call 999, you still need to see a doctor or asthma nurse within 24 hours.

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.
- 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.

- 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

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