

Thunderstorm Asthma

The Thunderstorm Asthma risk “season” runs from 1 October to 31 December.

While Thunderstorm Asthma rarely occurs, it is serious enough to merit our attention, preparation and watchfulness.

Thunderstorm asthma is thought to be triggered by a unique combination of high amounts of grass pollen in the air and a certain type of thunderstorm.

For people who have asthma or hay fever this can trigger severe asthma symptoms.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/thunderstorm-asthma

In this rare event pollens are broken into miniscule particles by the storm and blown through the air. Breathing these particles can be fatal for those at risk.

During such an event, so many people can be affected that services become disrupted. Ambulance Victoria was overwhelmed and unable to attend to all calls during the 2016 epidemic.

We need to prepare for and activate personal safety plans in the same way we prepare for and respond to extreme fire risk.

To identify risk of a Thunderstorm Asthma event on any given day, go to www.melbournepollen.com.au/ or use your search engine for “Deakin AIRwatch”.

These sites give risk ratings from low to extreme for each day.

During “high” and “extreme” risk days, stay indoors before and during a storm with doors and windows shut. Have air conditioning on recirculate

Who is at risk?

those with a history of **asthma**

those who suffer from **hay fever**

those with **allergies to grass pollen**

unfortunately, some people may not be aware of allergies or have undiagnosed asthma

Prepare for Thunderstorm Asthma

It is vital to prepare well in advance:

Be informed about Thunderstorm Asthma

Check websites for risk levels daily

Create a plan with your doctor - even if you’ve never had asthma but have hay fever or grass pollen allergy. Have your doctor teach you how to use reliever medication with a spacer

Discuss taking antihistamine medication prior to a weather event and write this into your plan.

Have an asthma reliever medication like Ventolin on hand

(available over the counter at pharmacies) – and use with a spacer

Learn asthma first aid and apply it at any first sign: difficulty breathing, wheezing, coughing or tightness in the chest. Go to www.nationalasthma.org.au/asthma-first-aid

Call 000 for ambulance if symptoms worsen or don’t get better.

Ask for estimated time of arrival and if the wait is long, consider getting someone to drive you to a hospital or GP clinic whilst continuing to use the reliever medication