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Asthma at School is Disruptive to Routine, Underdiagnosed, and Often Poorly Understood, Survey Suggests

*American Lung Association and National Association of School Nurses
Call on Parents, Schools and Health Care Providers to Establish Asthma Action Plans*

New York, NY — According to a national sample of members surveyed from the National Association of School Nurses, asthma is more disruptive of school routines than any other chronic condition, has a significant impact on absenteeism and many school staff may lack awareness of the causes of an asthma attack. The NASN and the American Lung Association are working together to improve communications between parents, school nurses and health care professionals in an effort that may help reduce the number of asthma episodes or attacks children experience each year.

Results from the Asthma in Schools survey suggest that an overwhelming majority (85%) of school nurses believe that there are students with undiagnosed asthma in their schools. More than half found asthma more disruptive to the student body routine than any other chronic health condition, with more than a third of nurses having to respond to an acute asthma attack or episode at least 11 times in the last school year.

“We recognize the damage that can be done to the education process when 14 million school days are lost annually due to asthma,” said Dorothy Reilly, RN of the National Association of School Nurses. “This survey suggests that when it comes to asthma management as it impacts a child’s educational experience, there is definite room for improvement.”

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Asthma is a serious illness, affecting more than 5.2 million school-aged children, according to the American Lung Association. However, with proper treatment and preventative care, it is very controllable, particularly if parents take an active role. Although more than half of nurses reported that parents routinely update them at regular intervals about children with asthma in their care, still 43% said parents rarely provide updates about their children's condition.

"Communication is critical. The key is to have an Asthma Action Plan developed by the child's physician and parents and shared with the school nurse. School nurses are highly capable and professional -- they will be able to assist children with asthma if they have been alerted to the condition and the specific needs of the child," said Adrienne Weiss-Harrison, MD of the American Lung Association. "Asthma conditions can be dynamic; as a treatment plan changes, the parents need to inform the nurse. Just as they do at home, parents can take simple steps to ensure their children with asthma are safe at school."

Effective school asthma management can help prevent an asthma attack, according to Dr. Weiss-Harrison. This includes:

- Keeping children with asthma away from potential triggers, such as mold, dust, chemicals, strong odors or furry or feather animals;
- Ensuring children take their medication at regular intervals, as prescribed;
- Guaranteeing ready access to medications in case of an asthma episode, and
- Allowing children to pre-treat with medications prior to exercise to prevent breathing problems associated with exercise-induced asthma.

One very important issue is access to rescue inhalers—medication that can stop an asthma attack and help save a child's life. Although 70% of nurses reported that their schools have policies allowing children to carry rescue inhalers with them at all times, approximately 40% say that parents are not aware of the school's policy.

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“When an asthma attack occurs, having a rescue inhaler in hand—not sitting in the nurse’s office—can mean the difference between life and death,” said John Kirkwood, President & CEO of the American Lung Association. “We believe children have the right to easily accessible quick relief inhalers. We want to encourage students who are responsible and developmentally able to carry their inhalers and self-administer medications so that they become independent in their asthma management.”

According to the American Lung Association, asthma among students from minority or underserved populations such as Hispanics, African-Americans or Asian Americans is seen as an increasing problem. More than two-thirds of the school nurses surveyed think that there are insufficient resources in place to address health concerns among these students.

Overall, the survey results suggest a need for more awareness of both asthma triggers and strategies for managing asthma attacks. More than half of the nurses said student and staff awareness of asthma triggers was fair or poor. Likewise, more than half the school nurses rated parent’s awareness about managing their child’s asthma as fair or poor.

The American Lung Association offers several educational programs to help manage asthma, including “Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools,” a program designed to assess indoor air quality and provide recommendations for improvement, and “American Lung Association Open Airways for Schools,” a student-focused program proven to decrease the number and duration of children’s asthma episodes.

For more details, a complete copy of the Asthma in Schools Survey is available online at www.lungusa.org.

About the American Lung Association

Celebrating its 100th anniversary, the American Lung Association works to prevent lung disease and promote lung health. Lung diseases and breathing problems are the leading causes of infant

deaths in the United States today, and asthma is the leading serious chronic childhood illness. Smoking remains the nation's leading preventable cause of death. Lung disease death rates continue to increase while other leading causes of death have declined.

The American Lung Association has long funded vital research on the causes of and treatments for lung disease. It is the foremost defender of the Clean Air Act and laws that protect citizens from secondhand smoke. The Lung Association teaches children the dangers of tobacco use and helps teenage and adult smokers overcome addiction. It educates children and adults living with lung diseases on managing their condition. With the generous support of the public, the American Lung Association is "Improving life, one breath at a time."

For more information about the American Lung Association or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or log on to www.lungusa.org. The American Lung Association does not endorse products.

About the National Association of School Nurses

The National Association of School Nurses, incorporated in 1979, is a non-profit specialty nursing organization dedicated to the delivery of professional school health services to promote optimal learning in students. With more than 11,000 members nationwide, NASN serves as a resource for school health programs and works as an influential advocate for school nursing. The organization strongly supports outcome-based research that validates school nursing practice.

A major focus of the National Association of School Nurses is the prevention of illness, disability, and the early detection and correction of health problems. Other areas of concern include management of children with special health care needs in the school setting, immunization and access to health care for all children, and proper management of students with chronic health conditions, such as asthma.

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