

# Asthma Among Older Adults in Massachusetts



## Managing Your Asthma

It is important to remember that your asthma can be controlled so that you can be healthy and active.

Here are some tips:

- **Identify and avoid the triggers that can cause your asthma symptoms or attacks.** Common asthma triggers include dust mites, pet dander, mold, tobacco smoke, wood smoke, and outdoor air pollution.
- **Ask your health care provider about developing an asthma action plan.** An action plan can help you identify worsening asthma symptoms and outlines treatment as recommended by your provider.
- **Make sure you are up-to-date with flu and pneumococcal vaccinations.** Adults with asthma are at high risk for complications from lung infections such as influenza and pneumonia. Getting vaccinated is the first and most important step you can take to protect yourself.
- **Tell your health care provider about all medications you are taking so he or she can recommend the right treatments for you.** Some asthma medications may make other health conditions worse, and some other medications may make your asthma worse.

## What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects a person's airways. Symptoms include wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. Although there is no cure, people with asthma can control their disease and live healthy, active lives.

Asthma affects people of all ages, but older adults with the disease tend to have worse outcomes than people who are younger. Asthma in older adults is often under-diagnosed and under-treated, which can lead to disability or even death. In the United States, over 16 million adults have asthma; approximately 16% are aged 65 and older.<sup>1</sup>

## How Are Older Adults in Massachusetts Affected?

In Massachusetts, asthma is becoming more common among older adults. The percentage of adults aged 65 and older with asthma has been increasing since 2000.<sup>2</sup> An estimated 8.4% of older adults had asthma in 2009. This equals nearly 70,000 people.

Most poor asthma outcomes can be prevented. Still, many Massachusetts older adults with asthma are hospitalized or even die from the disease. Adults aged 65 and older have the second highest asthma hospitalization rate of any age group and it has been rising. In 2008, this group experienced an average of 7 asthma hospitalizations each day. Older adult women, Hispanics and Black, non-Hispanics are particularly at risk.<sup>3</sup>

Adults aged 65 and older account for over half of all asthma deaths in Massachusetts and experience a higher asthma death rate than any other age group. From 2000 through 2007, 327 older adults died from asthma.<sup>4</sup>

## Addressing Asthma in Massachusetts

Asthma is an important public health problem. The Asthma Prevention and Control Program at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health works with partners throughout the state to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents with asthma and to reduce disparities in asthma outcomes. For more information, visit our website at [www.mass.gov\dph\asthma](http://www.mass.gov\dph\asthma) or call 617-624-5070.

1. National Health Interview Survey, 2008. 2. MA Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. 3. MA Inpatient Hospital Discharge Database. 4. MA Registry of Vital Records & Statistics.

